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ABSTRACT

This writing resource book offers ideas for sharing stories, turning them into text, and reaching a wider audience through simple publishing processes in community settings and through group processes. Chapter 1 shows how the "Building Canberra" project, on which the book is based, came about. It discusses the policy framework in which it was situated and describes community writing and publishing as an area of activity in Australia. Chapter 2 introduces the people, stories, and settings. Chapter 3 presents ideas for community writing and publishing activities for use in various community settings. It outlines the way stories were worked on in groups as a three-part process--bringing people together, encouraging story sharing, and highlighting shared stories--and addresses scheming and plotting. Chapter 4 details ways in which scrapbooks are useful, explores scribing's potential in recording stories, and offers examples of simple group writing activities. Chapter 5 on making simple books and commercial publications includes detailed information about the planning and decision-making process involved in the various stages of preparing a manuscript for printing and marketing the book. Chapter 6 makes recommendations for long-term community writing and publishing activities: setting up a writing and publishing group, employing a professional writer, and seeking funding. Chapter 7 reflects on the impact and meaning of writing and publishing in community settings. An index is appended. (YLB)

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OUT OF THE ORDINARY

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OUT OF THE ORDINARY

Inventive ways of bringing communities, their stories and audiences to light

BY

ANNIE BOLITHO *and*
MARY HUTCHISON

Published by Canberra Stories Group
Littlewood
Murrumbateman
NSW 2582

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Foreword

I FIRST BECAME ENTHRALLED by story when I was three and my father told me serial stories of the horrible witch of Wookie Hall who had purple hair and a treacle voice and yellow fingernails long as a telegraph pole. I retaliated with stories of mad cruel Mooney and weeping Looney whose strange round heads floated out of the darkest corners of my room. They had no bodies because Mooney had burned them in the kitchen stove. Mooney and Looney still lurk in the darkest corners of my room.

The point of this rather personal opening paragraph is that from our earliest years, stories thread their way through our lives and are our lives. When we gossip with our friends or describe the places where we live, when we grumble about the behaviour of our bosses, our neighbours or our partners, we cocoon our experiences in story.

'And then he hid under the piano.'
'He never!'
'He did. And he bit her on the leg.'
'He never.' 'He did.'

I first became aware of the power of story to weave magic with a group when I worked with recidivist prisoners in a Sydney jail.

'They don't trust anyone. Can't write. Won't do it,' said a large prison officer, looking at me with pitying scorn.

At first, I thought he was probably right. The men slouched and stared. I lacked any kind of framework. I floundered. Several times I wished I were at home. But little by little, as the words were written and read, the dynamic changed. Each story spun into other stories, binding us together so that process became community, however brief the time.

Another memory comes back to me. When I had just been appointed the new Director of the Australian Film Television and Radio School with a brief to introduce significant change, we ran a retreat. No-one wanted to come. No-one would speak. So we asked people to write. To close their eyes, think of coming to work, and then describe what they saw and how they felt:

Closed windows, eyes on the ground, rushing rushing always rushing, queues, frustration, work that never ends, nowhere to hang your coat, nowhere to sit down, stewed tea, always paper too much paper, meetings too many meetings.

The words were scrawled on butcher's paper and stuck up on the walls around us. Strings of words in red, blue and green. More immediately powerful than any carefully researched report. Impossible with those words to pretend that everything was right, that nothing needed to be done.

Writing and telling personal story bring their own kind of power. People who claim they cannot write will suddenly produce strong vivid language. Sometimes beautiful language. When I worked with a group of people who had a mental illness, I asked them to write about their surroundings.

My mind has left and I chase after it down
the dark and empty hall.
I cannot find a door. There are no doors.

Outside place had become a metaphor for inside emptiness. Someone else saw it differently.

The hall is filled with barbed wire, people are calling me
but I cannot reach them without tearing myself to bits.
I bleed. I tear my flesh.

For a while it seemed as if we might lose the power of story, as if it might be taken from us and shut inside the television boxes of the world. But story that comes from within people's experience will never be silenced, it lives within all of us. More and more, communities are turning back to story to tell and live their lives. So how can we make the most of each time that we are gathered together? How can those who work in community settings learn to use story in the most effective way?

In this book, *Out of the Ordinary*, Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchison bring a wealth of experience from their work in the field of community cultural development. They know the links between place and identity and how and why it is important that we document ourselves and our history. They have developed and planned numbers of community writing and publishing projects. Their scope is wide, from making the first approaches, to access and managing resources and publication.

They give such interesting, practical and thoughtful advice that the more I read, the more I wished they had written it earlier and the more I wanted to go out and try again. This is a useful and inspiring book.

ANNE DEVESON
January 1998

Introduction

Canberra was absolutely heaven for me when I first arrived here in August 1941. Yet I came as a prisoner with a police escort. This is how it came about.

Ernst Frohlich, *My First Home in Canberra*, p.31

HEARING INDIVIDUAL STORIES told in any one community is an invitation to come to the word 'ordinary' with new respect. The particularities in each telling subtly or overtly link one person to another. The process begins to highlight a distinct and yet delicate connection between people and place. *Out of the Ordinary* presents a framework for opening up these possibilities through story sharing, writing and publishing in community groups.

The material of the book is drawn from a project we called 'Building Canberra' in response to interest in stories of the local Canberra community. The stories that found a place in the project encompassed all types of Canberra experiences, from the early 'building' days through to very recent experiences of arrival, settling in and becoming part of local social life. In *Out of the Ordinary* the distinct and varied voices which emerged in the project weave through the text of the book, hinting at the possibility of local

identity – even in a city where the lived experience of place is over-written by such an impressive and oppressive external identity as 'national capital'.

Out of the Ordinary offers our experience of working with people's stories in Canberra's local community as an example of exploring what Sue Clifford and Angela King call 'local distinctiveness', referring to the particular and distinct qualities of a locality (Clifford and King, 1993). Loss of these qualities, which are a vital part of the way people relate to their place as home, work and leisure environment, has had an effect on the majority of Australian communities. Shopping mall, supermarket and fastfood landmarks are devised by corporations with values outside the realm of local concerns. *Out of the Ordinary* shows how people can make new connections with each other and become more aware of the particular place and people around them through sharing stories of their lives as a group process. As a resource book for people involved in a variety of activities – from heritage to health, from arts to education, from community development to cultural planning – it is intended as both a model and an inspiration for engaging with stories and writing in a way that highlights their extraordinary potential in each of these fields.

Story Sharing, Writing and Publishing with Community Groups

OUT OF THE ORDINARY offers imaginative and practical ideas for sharing stories, turning stories into text and reaching a wider audience through simple publishing processes. What distinguishes it from other writing resource books is its focus on community settings and group processes. Integral to our suggestions for stories and writing are approaches to working with groups, managing community projects and accessing appropriate resources. We also deal with issues such as ownership and control of stories, inclusiveness and barriers to participation and look at the value of the activities and processes we describe in relation to individual voice, and group and community identity. We think of all these aspects of story sharing, writing and publishing with community groups, in short, as 'community writing and publishing'. (For further discussion of the wider field of community writing and publishing see Chapter One.)

Community writing and publishing connects with, and may take place within, many other fields of interest including community arts, community history, community education, adult literacy, community health. In *Out of the Ordinary* we look in detail at our work with Narrabundah Walking Group (a health and well being group which met at a local health centre), Kirra Day Centre group (a group of frail aged people

who met regularly for story-telling activities at a local library), an Art and Working Life project at Canberra's public hospital, a community festival, public story-sharing gatherings which we initiated in response to interest in local Canberra history, and two community writing and publishing groups that developed through our activities.

Here these settings are described as 'community settings'. In Canberra, as in many contemporary urban settings, people often come together in groups through a common bond such as their health needs, their work, a particular experience in life such as migration, or a stage of life such as ageing. This way of making bonds underlies the understanding of the word community that runs through this book, as a community of interest. We found that being able to explore other realms of their life experience within the frame of a group activity meant that people became more closely related to each other and where they lived. Interestingly this enabled people to think of themselves as part of a community in its more traditional definition – a sense of identity emerging from a particular geographic location.

Out of the Ordinary describes the way we have developed writing and publishing as accessible and meaningful activities within community groups, approaching them hand in hand with story sharing. Writing is often assumed to require high levels of literacy and perhaps a literary bent, and publishing suggests a competitive activity in which only highly skilled and special authors feature. However, in working from story sharing to writing, writing loses its traditional identity as a solitary activity and becomes a medium of expression in groups. The immediate experience of finding an audience in this context encourages people to see themselves as having stories to tell. It also opens up the possibilities of publication as a way of reaching a wider audience, and provides motivation for writing.

Moving from listening to the stories told in a group context to getting them down in written form requires particular skills. *Out of the Ordinary* introduces the idea of scribing as an unthreatening and creative way of recording oral material without the technological complications of tape-recording and transcription. It also suggests the use of scrapbooks as a useful means of gathering stories together and extending the experience of story sharing to the possibility of making books.

Taking up writing in this way has an extraordinary capacity to bring people closer to the stories that inform their lives, and to each other. In the late 1990s there is growing investment in bringing material collected from oral sources to an audience through high budget multi-media technology, but we would like to suggest that this does not supersede the particular values of more traditional technologies. One of our intentions in *Out of the Ordinary* is to create interest in the potency and charm of bringing conversation and writing

together. Another is to show the influence this can have in community building and in the expression of people's sense of place and identity.

The idea of sharing stories in groups, or of people in similar situations coming together to write about aspects of their life experience, is often seen as a purely 'therapeutic' activity. *Out of the Ordinary* steers away from understandings that put undue weight on therapeutic intentions and outcomes. As many professionals working with writing and reminiscence in the health field would testify, a growing sense of emotional resolution, confidence and pride amongst members of a group may be a direct benefit of taking up these activities. However this book looks at a wider application founded in viewing stories and writing in terms of arts or, more broadly, cultural activity.

In a practical way, story sharing, writing and publishing with community groups bring arts activity into everyday settings. It invites a wide range of people to experience the value and power of creating something meaningful and shareable for an audience. In shaping their stories for others, individuals become aware of their distinct voices as authors and appreciate those characteristics in others. They have the opportunity to be a part of the process involved in artswork as well as with the skills involved in writing, performance, graphic design and presentation. There may also be other positive outcomes – such as the development of new networks, learning about group process and leadership and a stronger awareness of the different cultural backgrounds that make a contribution to a locality.

At a more philosophical level, bringing people's stories out of the ordinary lends them visibility as part of our cultural life and enriches our perceptions of local and national identity. For us, this is the link between the different environments where the practical suggestions in *Out of the Ordinary* may be applied. What we are discussing is a vital cultural activity which draws on, and encourages awareness of, a particular artform and contributes to our sense of who we are. In this way our work is strongly connected with the large field of community arts practice or, as it is known in its broader application, community cultural development.

As well as creative approaches to story sharing and writing, *Out of the Ordinary* takes up publishing as a vital ingredient in the process of sharing stories. We suggest a number of ways of making group publications. All highlight a group process in which participants retain control and ownership of their work. In some contexts making a small book of stories for distribution to friends and family is a satisfying way of concluding an experience of sharing stories with each other. In others, group members may decide to continue as a community writing and publishing group. Canberra Stories

Group, the publisher of *Out of the Ordinary*, is one such example.

In Canberra those aspiring to find and make manifest their sense of local identity confront powerful and stereotyped notions of place. Canberra Stories Group, working within a broad community cultural development framework, shows that for locals Canberra is more than a planned city with an assured national identity. This group emerged from our work and continued as an independent community writing and publishing group. Members now have considerable experience and are often approached by others wanting the kind of information provided here. Part of the story of this book is their story – it is a tribute to their interest in, and engagement with, the skills we wanted to pass on that they are in a position to publish *Out of the Ordinary*.

The Organisation of the Book

OUT OF THE ORDINARY contains practical information drawn from the experience of working on 'Building Canberra'. It also has the strong stamp of many of the people who participated in the project, with direct quotes throughout the text giving visibility to the stories it generated.

The first two chapters give background to the 'Building Canberra' project, our material and approach. The arts policies and local circumstances which framed the project and important influences on our work are covered in Chapter One. This chapter also provides an introduction to community cultural development and community writing and publishing. The second chapter gives a sense of the different environments in which we worked in Canberra.

Chapters Three and Four provide the groundwork which would enable a reader to set up story-sharing and writing activities with a group. Chapter Three presents a series of simple steps for bringing people together to share stories, as well as offering specific ideas and information on group processes and activities which readers may want to try out in their own ways in their own settings. Chapter Four describes ways of getting onto the page in writing the stories that are told amongst a group of people. These chapters will appeal to those who enjoy people and their stories, and are interested in getting something going in their own community. They will also be helpful for those who are already doing this kind of work and are looking for new ideas.

Chapters Five and Six take things further, discussing various approaches to publication with groups and offering information about funding and support structures as well as models for continuing as a community writing and publishing group. As such they are intended for groups which have grown more defined in their intentions. Chapter Seven offers a conclusion with some of our thoughts on the value and vitality of the activities we have described.

Each chapter opens with a summary of its contents and a list of topics covered. Publication details of material referred to within a chapter as well as a list of other useful references and contacts are provided at the end of each chapter. Authors of material quoted are named according to their wishes.

A Personal Note

OUT OF THE ORDINARY is the product of a tightly woven collaboration. Its creation over a number of years has been a process of reflection in conversation and writing on community cultural development.

This conversation stretches beyond and around a simple interest in one field of practice. Between us our experience of working with writing in the community lies in a broad range of areas including heritage and primary health, adult education in TAFE contexts including adult literacy, outreach-based writing classes for women and adult migrant education, oral history, social history, community theatre and reminiscence work. We share a strong interest in making what are termed artists' books and in documentation as an art form.

Our love of bookmaking probably contributed to our original intention to put together a short handbook documenting the 'Building Canberra' project. Putting the documentation together gave us the opportunity to explore in more depth the pleasure, process, problem-solving and potential of creative work in groups involving adults. Through doing this it gradually became clear that there were a significant number of areas in which our experience might be applied and that the audience for this material was broader than the community arts sector which we had originally envisaged.

Our challenge has been to create a book which anyone with whom we worked on the project would find readable, and which people in a variety of settings might also be able to use.

We also want to convey something of the impact of the project on us. Our more philosophical thinking about it is, in a sense, eminently practical. The listening and writing which we did together during the project gave each of us the privileged sense of being repositories of personal stories located in Canberra. Each story is specific to a particular person's sense

of themselves in a certain place and time. They do not fit together as a linear history. Knowing the story of where the seed of a certain walnut tree came from, for example, endows us with a new sense of place, not in the sense of understanding more of the city's past, but rather in appreciating an enriched sense of its present. The stories of the 'Building Canberra' project shifted our sense of who we were in relation to where we lived and who we lived amongst.

Over the course of many drafts we have worked and reworked our depiction of the experiences, the organisation, the skills, the changes and the outcomes that marked the process of working on the project. However the stories and the people who contributed them remain the *raison d'être* of this book and we would encourage readers to go to the publications they have been drawn from to get a fuller sense of the ordinary/fascinating people we worked with.

We have also taken the decision to step into the text with our own stories. Neither of us would like the reader to be left with a sense of anonymity in relation to the authors of a work that is so deeply concerned with the question of writing and identity. We hope that giving you a sense of who we are will loosen the boundaries that might otherwise exist between us as the writers and those readers who share our interests.

References and Useful Publications

My First Home in Canberra: Canberra residents' memories of their first homes 1920–1990, Canberra Stories Group, Murrumbateman, 1994, p.31

Sue Clifford and Angela King (eds), *Local Distinctiveness: place, particularity and identity*, Common Ground, London, 1993

Policies and influences

Building Canberra

Community Cultural Development

The ACT Community Literature Program

Wider Influences

Community Writing and Publishing in Australia

IN THIS CHAPTER we show how the 'Building Canberra' project, on which *Out of the Ordinary* is based, came about, and discuss the immediate and wider policy framework in which it was situated. We also highlight major influences on the way we developed it as a community writing and publishing training project and finally offer a brief picture of community writing and publishing as an area of activity in Australia.

Community arts presentation in a workplace setting: Canberra Hospital Art in Working Life project 1992

Building Canberra

I remember standing at the window of Russell Offices,
Air Block 2,
Seeing the Lake fill up
The day before we went over to the Admin building
across the lake bed –
It was a fairly steep climb –
The bloke that was driving me said
'This'll be the last time we can do this'
And the next day you couldn't do it
Well, I would've chanced it in a submarine.

Tom O'Brien, 'Seeing the Lake Fill Up', *The Journey*, p.10

'BUILDING CANBERRA' was planned as a project which would make people aware of the possibilities of community writing and publishing by involving them in practical activities. Our approach was to offer 'hands-on' skills appropriate to the particular situations and people we met with, rather than establish and lead activities. In this sense we 'walked alongside' people who were open to the idea that community writing and publishing might enrich/expand their existing activity or sense of direction.

We became interested in developing a project of this nature in 1991, through our job-share position as ACT Community Literature Officer. During this time we were employed by the Arts Council of the ACT and based in the ACT Library Service. As a consequence we worked closely with local libraries, health centres, other local community arts programs and writing groups – including those interested in local history.

At that time we knew that a project of this nature would fit into arts funding guidelines as a community cultural development project. We were also aware that few such projects touched on community writing and publishing and were excited that we might be able to contribute something that would open up and sustain a connection between community cultural development and community writing and publishing.

Community Cultural Development

THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA many inspiring arts projects have been carried out within the arts funding policy framework of community cultural development. They are often referred to as 'community arts' projects. Although there are variations in practice, they are typically designed by a community organisation in relation to its constituency, and employ a professional artist or artists to work with participants. (See Useful Publications below for references which provide an

overview of the field.) This approach as it has developed over the last twenty years reflects an intention to draw out the creative expression of those who participate and to give them access to skills development in different art forms. Underpinning the practice is a confidence that everyone has something to say, a unique way of expressing it, and that in collaboration with others their work will reflect a sense of community identity which will enrich and empower participants and audiences alike. The focus is not on the more famous talent in the community, though their support may provide an important source of inspiration (Bell, 1996).

Community arts came onto the political and social agenda in the context of the community social action of the 1970s, which produced such phenomena as community centres and community co-operatives in various parts of the world. In Australia, Labor Government arts funding policies of the early 1970s encouraged wider participation in arts activity and set up funding for groups of people to carry out arts activities in relation to their common interests and aspirations. Initially this funding came through the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, the federal arts funding body, but was gradually also supported by state and territory government arts funding programs. By the mid 1980s community arts centres, networks and organisations, as well as professional community arts organisers and community artists, were part of a scenario of varied and challenging arts activity playing a vital role in the expression of Australian cultural identity.

An important policy move in federal arts funding saw this activity expressed as 'community cultural development' and, as a consequence, the Community Arts Board changed its name to the Community Cultural Development Board — now Fund (see Hawkins, 1993 for a detailed discussion of these policies). The relationship between community arts and other broadly cultural sectors — eg environment, heritage, health — was now high on the agenda and the acknowledgement of the value of such connections by local government throughout Australia was a major achievement for the new approach. It has led to a great many partnerships between community arts-based organisations and local government-based services, as well as the development of cultural planning as part of local town planning and land management activities. It has also prompted an interest in training in the practical applications of arts activities to the various local government sectors. It was within this arena of community cultural development funding that we saw an opportunity for 'Building Canberra'. It was the right time for such a project, given the developments in the Community Literature Program at the time of our appointment.

The ACT Community Literature Program

THE COMMUNITY LITERATURE PROGRAM was established as part of the Arts Council of the ACT in the mid 1980s, as one of the state and territory-based literature programs designed to support writing activities at a local level. It was funded by the Literature Fund of the Australia Council, within the frame of its community projects program, a program which had some intentions in common with community cultural development.

It was very much in the spirit of community cultural development's new emphasis on partnerships between local government services and arts organisations, that the Arts Council negotiated the placement of the Community Literature Program in the ACT Library Service in 1991. The result of this placement was that the community had greater access to the program and the program had access to a variety of new possibilities, most notably collaboration with enthusiastic librarians and the use of a range of branch libraries with their own strong local characteristics as venues for activities.

In developing the Program in its new location we drew on the ideas and practice of community cultural development, as well as our own previous experience as writers, and our wider networks in community writing and publishing (see below). We were keen to develop and explore our connections with local government agencies and to widen our network of participants. On this basis we developed a program which supported reading, writing and story sharing in the community with the logo 'Getting the Word Around'.

GETTING THE WORD AROUND

community literature

AS THE COMMUNITY LITERATURE PROGRAM'S placement in the ACT Library Service was the first partnership that the Arts Council had set up, they supported our interest in encouraging an understanding of community writing and publishing possibilities and widening the program's participant base. A successful application for community cultural development funds brought 'Building Canberra' into being.

We were able to use the short-term practical frame of the project to address some of the community interests emerging through the longer-term Community Literature Program. For instance, when librarians drew our attention to their story-telling activities with the day centre for older people next door and indicated how they would like to extend these, we could become actively involved in passing on skills. Or when a fellow artsworker planned a community festival, we could explore the way writing could feature in this context, and offer it as a model for future activities.

Wider Influences

WHILE GOVERNMENT ARTS POLICIES and the interests of the Arts Council of the ACT clearly had an impact on our development of 'Building Canberra', the combined experience we brought to the position of Community Literature Officer also influenced it significantly. In the introduction, we've given some background about our professional interests. At the time of our appointment, Mary had spent some time working in community theatre and had been employed in a number of community writing and publishing projects. Through her work with the Homefront women's writing and publishing group she had become interested in the possibility of other writing projects in the community — projects in which participants could take charge of what they wanted to say and how, and reach a wider audience by working together as an independent group. Annie had been working in adult migrant education and adult literacy and had seen the powerful effect writing and making simple publications could have.

FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

Jena kept saying, 'there's this wonderful woman you really must meet. I'm sure you'd have a lot in common'. Somehow it was arranged. I don't remember the details. A phone call or two. Annie's voice. I think I was wary at first – those fancies that mutual friends sometimes have – but it seemed Annie was genuinely interested in my work. In retrospect I see

that real interest we have in the way we each approach writing as the cement of our collaboration.

Annie was sick on the day we had arranged to meet. I went to her place and was soon on an errand to the shop for food. At the kitchen table we began a conversation that has gone on for years and continues to energise us.

There were particular things we started to discuss that day; literacy work, handmade books, working with groups, our appreciation of small 'found' pieces of text. Stuck on the dashboard of Annie's car was a strip of dyno tape that read 'Mili and baby Mark', remnant of a previous owner.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

I arranged it. Jena had inspired me with talk of this woman's work with Homefront – how she used letters and lists and gave the women the space to become writers in their own way and to do it together. And now she and a sculptor were working as writer and artist in residence at Revolve, the Mugga Lane tip face recycling setup! Sure enough when she arrived at my place she was wearing local government green overalls and boots, carrying a notebook and pen.

I was pretty gripped by this first meeting with Mary – that someone would take such delight in the little publication that I'd worked on with the Italian women in Queanbeyan with Rosaria's naive impression of a sewing machine on the front that said SINGER. I was very fond of it myself. I was fond of all sorts of odd things in words that I found quite strong and that was why I'd left the epigrammatic reminder on my dashboard of the woman who'd had to go back to the Philippines.

We talked about the tip – about pieces of writing let go to flutter there – the letters and the captions in albums that when found read as potent fragments of people's lives.

We were both drawn to frameworks that affirmed difference, variety and distinctive qualities of voice and place. We saw the potential of writing as a powerful contribution to people's understanding of themselves within a broader community. Community cultural development offered us a way of thinking about writing in these terms, but it was other community writing and publishing activities in Australia and overseas which provided us with models of practice.

The United Kingdom (UK) community writing and publishing movement was an important inspiration for us. It emphasises the long-term group focus of writing activity, and provides models of writing and publishing groups in a variety of settings, including adult literacy and other areas supported by local government. Drawing on this, we saw 'Building Canberra' as a way of exploring how the short-term project model, which is the predominant community cultural development approach, could work with long-term aims and

with established groups. We were also inspired by this movement's concern with independent group publishing. Not only were writers connected with an audience but they maintained control over their contribution and its published representation. In the most exciting way this process highlighted varied and different voices in the domain of books.

One of the first steps we took in our training activities was to invite Al Thomson from the UK Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, who was visiting Canberra, to give short workshops to librarians, community arts officers, writers and representatives of writing groups. He outlined the history and characteristics of the UK community writing and publishing movement, particularly its emphasis on on-going groups in which members develop and pass on skills in both writing and publishing to others over a period of time. Later in the year, Cliff Smyth of Victorian Community Writers Inc. (VCW), an organisation strongly influenced by the UK movement, was our guest. In his workshop he highlighted the role which libraries had played in supporting the activities of on-going writing groups in Melbourne, and introduced participants to the valuable role VCW had played for a wide range of community writing and publishing groups in urban, regional and rural Victoria.

In looking for ways of bringing community cultural development ideas together with writing, we found strong links between community writing and publishing and the oral history movement, on the basis of a shared interest in a wide range of stories and voices. This connection enabled us to expand our contact with and knowledge of the work of writers like Roberta Bonnin in Queensland, Barbara Brooks and Colleen Burke in New South Wales and Robyn Friend in Tasmania. These writers, along with Cliff Smyth and others whose publications and work we refer to throughout this book, were important influences on the 'Building Canberra' project.

To make more accessible the work that had inspired and influenced us, we developed, in association with the ACT Library Service, a community writing and publishing collection. This collection is still extant and includes both Australian and overseas community writing publications which offer a wide range of models and approaches – both project and long-term group publications. A number of the community publications referred to in *Out of the Ordinary* are in this collection. The collection is held at the Griffith Library in the ACT and material may be accessed through interlibrary loan (see Useful Publications and Addresses). Another collection which includes community writing and publishing material, which we accessed for information during the project, is the Community Arts Resource Collection (CARC), held by the Victorian College of the Arts. It may be accessed through an on-line data base.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

The community publication that made instant sense to me when I first saw its 20 page, half A4 format with red, black and white card cover was People with Pain Speak Out. *Here a health worker in country Victoria realised that people who felt trapped in their situation could learn and teach by putting the experience of pain on paper and making a book of it.*

Another of my favourites is Daring Hearts, *a sophisticated publication from QueenSpark Books. In this case I love the way the contributors entrusted their stories to me as a reader. Collectively they tell of a particular world – of what it was like to be lesbian or gay in '50s and '60s Brighton, then a gay mecca.*

Both are brave books. Books groups of people were inspired to make. Books that found their way on to my shelves because I got involved in this thing called community writing and publishing. It's an unwieldy term. To get a feel for it I have to go back to the books. Every Birth it Comes Different, No Collars, No Cuffs, Pure Running – a life story, *the* Foxfire *books, The* Recollections *books from the Hawthorn Community Education Project.*

Each is powerful and important. But their fate is often to get lost. Many don't have spines, so libraries find them difficult to display. They're brought out in small one-off print runs. Above all there is no distribution network in Australia which means they are very difficult to track down.

They're part of a genre that can't be taken for granted. One that doesn't have an easy descriptor because so few people come into contact with enough of it to know that there's plenty out there. Over two years we made a point of collecting it. We went after it. We stayed with the term community writing and publishing which speaks for the reality that writing with serious intentions is written for an audience and that much of the writing done in community settings finds its way into published form.

Community Writing and Publishing in Australia — an Overview and Two Vital Models

THE HALLMARK OF COMMUNITY WRITING and publishing is that it comes from a heterogeneous range of independent groups of people who are working together to develop their writing and bring it to a wider audience. It is neither specialty publishing nor work that anticipates mainstream publishing interest. In a climate dominated by a small number of large publishers with mass audience targets, carefully considered published outcomes of group projects can find a niche of their own.

Australian community writing and publishing activity includes anthologies which speak of the experience of particular community groups — an example here is Caring Words, a group of carers and people with disability whose work we discuss later in the book — as well as regional collections of short stories and poetry. Sometimes publications are generated by funded projects and supported by skilled workers. For instance *No Collars, No Cuffs* was the outcome of an Art in Working Life project in the building industry with poet Geoff Goodfellow. Other publications come from Aboriginal history programs, health centres, women's writing groups and adult reading and writing programs. Many explore different cultural perspectives.

The UK Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (or Fed) has provided an important inspiration for community writing and publishing in Australia. Its concerted, strongly networked approach to co-operative publication and distribution of books presents a genuine alternative to competitive mainstream writing and publishing interests. As the voice of the community writing and publishing movement in the UK, it provides member groups with a distribution network, a regular newsletter and magazine, as well as organising workshops and festivals and lobbying for funds.

Current members of the Fed include groups who support and develop local history projects, groups working with adult literacy, and others concerned with such interests and issues as the experience of disability, survival in the mental health system, gay and lesbian sexuality, homelessness and minority ethnicity. A strong strand of the Fed's identity has been the fostering of the tradition of working class writing — its particular voices, dialects, rhythms and forms (see Morley and Worpole, 1982).

Gatehouse is a member group particularly known for producing books 'for and by adult learners', QueenSpark for its work recovering lost histories and telling alternative histories of working life, the Ethnic Communities Oral Histories Project for its publications featuring biographical stories of migration.

The Centreprise Publishing Project represents an important strand in the development of what is now known as 'reminiscence work' through their early and energetic exploration and publication of working class autobiography and reminiscence from the London borough of Hackney in the early 1970s.

Drawing on the Fed model, individual writers in Victoria who were interested in working with and supporting community writing groups, formed Victorian Community Writers Inc. As an incorporated group they applied for funding and set up a number of projects including country writing tours and workshops, a manuscript assessment service for poems and stories, and a newsletter, with the aim of helping groups to form a self-supporting federation. This was eventually achieved and for a number of years the Victorian Federation of Community Writers Inc. has functioned as an umbrella for community writing and publishing groups around the state.

Rural groups form a majority of the membership of the Victorian Fed and it assists their activities by circulating information, mentoring new writing groups, creating publications aimed at supporting writing groups, and seeking funding support. From 1985-95, in Melbourne's western suburbs, there was also an exciting federation of groups which had grown around the Footscray Community Arts Centre with the support of the centre's writing officer, Sherryl Clark.

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Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchison (eds), *The Journey: stories written for, told and taken down at 'Collecting and Recording People's Stories'*, unpublished ms, May 1992

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Gay Hawkins, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: constructing community arts*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993

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Useful Publications and Addresses

Vivienne Binns (ed), *Community and the Arts*, Pluto Press Australia, Sydney, 1991

Margaret Simpson, *Home Bound: community art in the Majura Women's Group*, Majura Women's Group, ACT, 1996

Patrick O'Farrell and Louella McCarthy (eds), *Community in Australia*, Community History Program University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1994

Deirdre Williams, *Creating Social Capital: a study of the long-term benefits from community based arts funding*, Community Arts Network of South Australia, Adelaide, 1995

Community Writing Collection, ACT Library Service, Griffith Library, 25 Blaxland Crescent, Griffith, ACT 2604 Contact (02) 6207 5723 for information and internet address. Material available on inter-library loan. It is expected that there will be a link between the Community Writing Collection and the Community Arts Resource Collection (see over)

Community Arts Resource Collection, Victorian College of the Arts. Database at www.vca.unimelb.edu.au. Material available on interlibrary loan. This address will offer a link to the Community Writing Collection

Victorian Federation of Community Writers Inc., PO Box 55, Bonnie Doon, Victoria 3720.

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, UK ST6 6DR. email. fwwcp@mcmail.com

The Oral History Association of Australia NSW Branch, c/o Oral History Program, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

The Oral History Association of Australia SA Branch, Institute Building, 122 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide, SA 5000

The people, the stories, the place

Narrabundah Walking Group

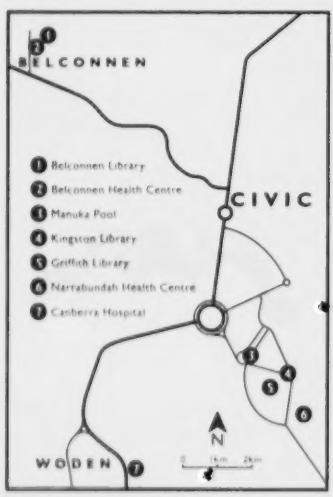
Kirra Day Centre

Southside Community Festival

Canberra Hospital Art in Working Life Project

Gatherings to Share Community Histories

Two Community Writing and Publishing Groups



IN THIS CHAPTER we introduce the people and the stories which appear throughout the book. Here we hope to capture a sense of the pleasure and energy that went with working with these people and bringing their stories to light.

Each of the settings we worked in for 'Building Canberra' had its own particular characteristics and characters. In each we explored different approaches and outcomes. While the following chapters open our process out thematically, here we situate it in each of its contexts.

We intend that each brief outline will give people an appreciation of the diversity of life experience which we encountered and also indicate the direction which the work in each situation took.

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Narrabundah Walking Group

When I go back to Narrabundah at any time it feels sweet because of the Walking Group. There are the memories of eating the Italian mushrooms and thinking we'd been poisoned and having to trust a member of the Walking Group – and they tasted delicious and there were no ill effects. The feasts we had – there was a kind of incongruity that we were a health group but we'd break out and have food that wasn't completely low-calorie. I have another memory of when I was leaving. One lady said, 'If I hadn't come to this group I would never have met someone like you'. It wasn't a loving thing, it was that she was saying that it was good to meet someone eccentric, and that she'd learnt to enjoy my eccentricities and my funny hats. I feel so attached to the Walking Group still – to the charm of their stories and the experience of being with them.

Annette Fisher, *Group Walks Around Narrabundah*, p.2

ANNETTE WROTE THIS INTRODUCTION to the simple publication we made as a result of 'walking alongside' the Walking Group. She had initiated the walks while working as an occupational therapist on a Health and Well Being Program at the Narrabundah Health Centre. She got in touch with us because she felt that it would be terrific to write down some of the stories the group told on their walks around the neighbourhood, and was keen to know how she could go about this.

Morning tea with the Narrabundah Walking Group – Mavis Humphries and Annie Bolitho

The job of capturing the talk as members walked was often a challenge; juggling notebooks in motion and keeping pace with the talking and walking. It was strange at first, for everyone, when we came along with notebooks and pens and took down bits of conversation as we walked along. But by the end of 1992 it certainly didn't seem so, to us or members of the group, who often called on people in the neighbourhood to join in the walking and story making as we walked along.

Hurry up!
It's beautiful
It's nice to see the blossoms and the daffs
Look at the blossom – look at the size of it!
We're going to have a wonderful walk.

How many people have we got today?
Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.
Yoohoo!

That's my brother, the one I was telling you about,
the sick one.

Which way do we go?
There must be some exciting street!

That sun is really warm.

Where'll we go?
That way!

Or that way!
We go amongst the bush.

Look at that lovely blossom!
You know those ones along Wentworth Avenue?
They're plums
People used to gather them years ago
Still do, I've seen them – for making jam.

'A Walk Around The Neighbourhood – Early Spring 1992', *Group Walks Around Narrabundah*, p.2

With the Walking Group, the group itself was a story. To capture this unique quality for the group as well as a wider audience we recorded the interaction around stories as well as the stories themselves. In preparing the group's publication, *Group Walks Around Narrabundah*, we arranged what we had taken down so the reader could enter the spirit of the walks and get a feeling for the characters.

For the group, the publication was the bringing together of the readings we had given over morning tea after a walk. It was a re-presentation of both the walk and the reading, and a reliving of the enjoyment of both. Members were delighted to pay $2.00 a copy to help cover costs.

Members of the Narrabundah Walking Group at Nancy and George's house

Kirra Day Centre

OUR FIRST INTRODUCTION to people attending Kirra Day Centre was at a story-telling session organised by staff at the Belconnen Library. In the open area in front of the Inquiries Desk about thirty older people were seated. Some were in wheel chairs; others had walking frames parked in convenient places. All were enjoying morning tea made and handed round by members of the Library Staff. Afterwards several librarians put on a bit of a show, with stories, skits and singing. Both tellers and audience clearly enjoyed the moments of interaction which took place.

Patsy Allan, the librarian who organised the sessions, was also a member of the Story Tellers Guild and was keen to find ways to encourage the Kirra people to share their stories. She also hoped there might be a way of recording some of them.

During 1992 we became part of the 'memories sessions' as they became known, recording stories through scribing (see Chapter Four) and working towards making a book. The big group we had first met became familiar individuals. There was Billy who often made us laugh with her stories of growing up in a large family during the Depression:

> *I was one of nine kids*
> *We had catastrophes every day*
> *There were often big clashes and fights*
> *Hair was pulled out and one thing and another*
> *You can imagine can't you?*
>
> Billy, *Unfolding Memories*, p.6

Madeline who had a story for every occasion, and a no nonsense style:

You got shocking headaches – we were rolling
dynamite and gelignite.
That's one thing I do remember about the place
You tried to keep your hands away from your face,
naturally
But you did get these dreadful headaches.
We used to have to wash as soon as we came out of there.
The uniforms were washed by the factory.
The best thing to cure the headaches was
a good glass of beer
And you'd have this charge of people going across
to the pub after work.

Madeline, *Unfolding Memories*, p.9

Frank, with his very strong sense of times past:

We used to represent the school in the procession
All the girls dressed up like nurses
And all the boys dressed up as wounded soldiers
We had a good time with the nurses
I was born in 1906
I'm still only a bit of a boy

Frank, *Unfolding Memories*, p.10

Kirra people at a memories session

There was Kathleen from Ireland, Lizette from Belgium, Tina from Holland, Suzie from South Africa and Betty, Mavis and Myrtle whose stories often vividly evoked rural Australia:

We were travelling around in the Depression
I'd be about 14 or 15 then
We had to travel around each town
Or we wouldn't get the dole
Was travelling along and a storm came up
We used to take turns to get water when we
were camping
We got to this shearing shed
I got the hurricane lamp
It was my turn to get water
I couldn't find the water tank
So I scooped the water off the ground
They boiled it up and drank it
Suddenly someone said, 'What's this in it?'
It was a turd.

Myrtle, *Unfolding Memories*, p.29

There were others who came less regularly, like Angela, who offered stories which became part of the whole:

I went for a picnic with my boyfriend
With a loaf of bread
A flask of wine
A book of verse
And there beside me in the wilderness
It was heaven before marriage
And never after

Angela, *Unfolding Memories*, p.27

Some people we didn't meet at the sessions, but heard about through Kirra staff who brought memories of those who could not attend.

Innes loved to dance
Mary enjoyed bonfire nights
June had a boyfriend when she was six and let him
eat her ice-creams
Helen used to go yabbying at Gawler and go
swinging on the footbridge

'Other Memories', *Unfolding Memories*, p.30

Mavis and Tina started to write stories and bring them along. Tina's early drafts were in Dutch. Tina's story about Aspirin began at a session and was finished later:

In Amsterdam, where we were living, there were not many doctors, but there was a sort of health centre... There were no pills yet, but there was one chemist shop, with rows of brown bottles containing all sorts of powders. They would weigh out a little of the powder, wrap it in a piece of paper – 10 to a box – and that was that!

It was the first world war and Dad was in the army, coming home on leave every now and then... When Dad was home and before we went to bed, he used to sing to us, with me, the youngest child, on his knee. It was at that time that aspirin was first sold, and to promote it they composed a jingle about how good it was. The whole army used to sing it, and then everyone was singing it; it was just one of those very catchy tunes sung in a very military, patriotic style.

After that he would sing a song about Bethlehem, but I don't know whether he sang any other songs – by then I would be fast asleep!

The words of the jingle went something like this

As soon as we are out of the army
We won't need to go to the doctor ever again
We'll be able to fix ourselves up
As soon as we are out of the army
And buy a pound or TEN of Aspirin

Aspirin for your mother, if she can't sleep
Aspirin for your wife if she is having a baby
Aspirin is good for soldiers, and for children
And everyone will be able to go along their merry way
When they have their supply of Aspirin

That was 75 years ago, and still everyone buys Aspros and that little chemist shop in Amsterdam is still there.

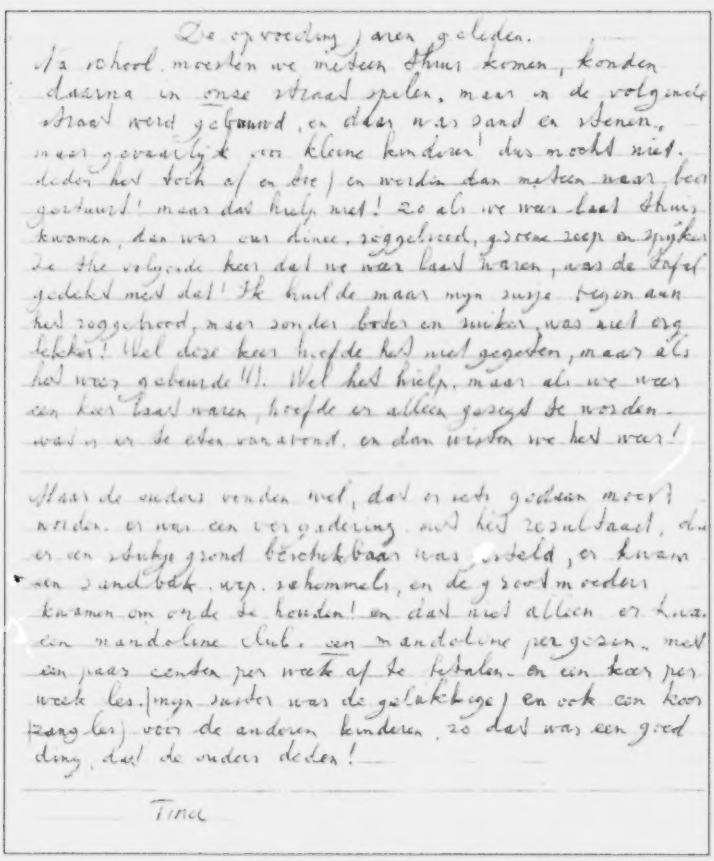
Tina, 'Aspirin – The New Panacea', *Unfolding Memories*, p.13

It was a memorable moment when Tina first recalled the jingle and sang it to the group in Dutch.

The memories sessions were held once every two months. The stories we have included above were told over four sessions. Each session included our readings from community publications made by similar groups and an open time of story sharing. Acquaintance with these books, and the confidence engendered in the group through hearing 'snippets' of their

own stories read from the previous session, confirmed the intention of making a book of the memories sessions' stories.

This pleasurable year-long collaboration resulted in *Unfolding Memories*, published by the ACT Library Service and launched at the Belconnen Library. Memories sessions with Kirra continued at the Library beyond our involvement. A proposal to encourage sharing stories through telling and writing at several day centres was enthusiastically taken up by staff and the Community Health section of the ACT Health Department. In 1994 two projects took place – at the Kirra Day Centre with Annie Bolitho and at the Dickson Day Centre with Sally Clarke, resulting in two further publications, *Elements of Life* and *Oh Dear, This Does Bring Back Memories: stories from the Dickson Seniors' Network*.



De opvoeding jaren geleden.

's a school moesten we meteen thuis komen, konden daarna en onze straat speler, maar in de volgende straat werd gebouwd, en daar was zand en stenen, maar gevaarlijk voor kleine kinderen! dus mocht niet. deden het toch af en toe, en werden dan meteen naar beer gestuurd! maar dat hielp niet! zo als we weer laat thuis kwamen, dan was our dinner, zoggelcoed, groene zeep en spijker. De the volgende keer dat we weer laat waren, was de tafel gedekt met dat! Ik kreeg de maar mijn zusje tegen aan het zoggebrood, maar zonder boter en suiker, was niet erg lekker! Wel deze keer hoefde het niet gegeten, maar als het weer gebeurde!!. Wel het hielp, maar als we weer een keer laat waren, hoefde er alleen gezegt te worden. wat is er de eten vanavond, en dan wisten we het weer!

Maar de ouders vonden wel, dat er iets gedaan moest worden. er was een vergadering met het zeultaart, dat er een stukje grond beschikbaar was, gedeld, er kwam een zandbak, wip, schommels, en de groot moeders kwamen om op de te houden! en dat niet alleen er kwa. een mandoline club, een mandoline per gezin. met een paar centen per week af te betalen. en een keer per week les. mijn zuster was de gelukkige) en ook een koor zang les. voor de anderen kinderen. zo dat was een goed ding, dat de ouders deden!

Tina

An early draft of one of Tina's stories

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Southside Community Festival

Relating stories at Southside Community Festival 1993

THE SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY FESTIVAL was initiated by the Festivals Officer at the Arts Council in association with local community groups, in 1992. It was held at the Manuka Pool, a longstanding focal point for community life in Canberra. At the invitation of the Festivals Officer we developed a story-sharing activity that featured at two successive festivals. It seemed a great opportunity to bring people together in a festive environment to talk and write about their experiences of living in the vicinity of the pool.

People of all generations had stories to tell of life in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Thin skinned fibro homes
Coloured like lipstick counters at a chemist shop
Ours was blue
Number 21 in a street named eleven...
A yard jungled by tomato vines
Thin, red hot chillies dangling under green leaves
Garlic stalks compete for the sun.
My father was from Calabrian farming stock
He 'accidentally' dropped pumpkin seeds
They grew wild among the wattle
In the plantation behind our fence
It caused problems for the department tractors
The Smiths next door at twenty-three
had neat lawns
front and back
'Waste of water' my dad would say
as he shared the 'fruit'
of ripe tasty tomatoes,
They made salads.

We, my sisters and I
Turned the handle on the juicing machine
filled hundreds of beer bottles with tomato meat

Endless seasonal chores
made us wish we were not ITALIAN...

Domenic Mico, 'Narrabundah ACT', *Stories of the Inner South*, p.43

The Festival was the occasion when we really developed our use of scrapbooks for writing. It was wonderful to see how quickly people took up ownership of them – reading them, writing in them, coming back to add something or check new entries. They offered the possibility of individual concentration on a memory as well as dialogue.

The book of stories collected at the 1992 Festival, *Stories of the Inner South: from a day of memories at Manuka Pool*, was launched at the 1993 Festival. That day was also a landmark of further developments with the launch of Canberra Stories Group who began gathering material on their chosen theme 'My first home in Canberra'.

Canberra Hospital Art in Working Life Project

THIS PROJECT TOOK PLACE in the wake of the amalgamation of Canberra's two public hospitals in which staff of Royal Canberra were moved to join forces with their counterparts at the much newer Woden Valley Hospital. A major public outcry had attended the closure of Royal Canberra which was the birthplace of generations of Canberrans. It is worth recording here that the ACT Government waited five years after the amalgamation before being confident enough, in the face of this strength of feeling, to rename Woden Valley Hospital. It is now called Canberra Hospital and to avoid confusion we refer to the project by this name.

Both workforces felt the sacrifice of having to give up their ways of doing things, with Royal Canberra staff keenly aware of the loss of old traditions. On top of this, the restructuring demanded by amalgamation had produced panic and mistrust which unions and management were working in various ways to overcome. Pressures of space made for stress in many work areas. The Woden Valley Hospital Art in Working Life project was proposed as a pilot project for the newly formed ACT Art in Working Life Committee. As a response to the situation, an arts project seemed to offer alternative ways of bringing people together.

We worked on the project as part of a team of Arts Council

community artsworkers which included visual artists, a theatre worker and a musician. The whole project, as a quick response to a situation, and a beginning for the Art in Working Life Committee, lasted for four weeks – our work took place over a fortnight. It was supported by participating unions and the Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU). The stories from the project showed the commitment hospital workers felt to their jobs, but they also reflected the tension of this workplace at the time.

It's like living in an airport lounge
It's all very transitory
And every now and then they voice page you...
'the flight out of here is now leaving...'

I've been trying to emigrate all morning!

'Flight 29 for anywhere', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.24

As part of the 'story gathering' aspect of the project, we did forty minute writing workshops with groups of workers, visited people in their areas of work where we talked to them and observed their activities, and made wide-ranging contact with people in the pre-fab canteen.

The Medical Records Section wrote a parody of the song Eliza Doolittle sings in My Fair Lady, 'Wouldn't it be Loverly' in their scrapbook. It addressed a few of their problems:

All we want is a room somewhere
Far away from the Kitchen air
No morgue, no smells, no stair
Oh! wouldn't it be loverly.

Lots of space to put all our files
Easy to find records bringing lots of smiles
No compactors, no tubs, more floor
Oh! wouldn't it be loverly.

And an office for Susan Chicchio
To hang her hat
No more standing in a space
And saying 'excuse me Sue', a Rat-A-Tat-Tat

Lots of windows to see the day
Lots of space for our desks to stay
No lost files, no one sick, no complaints
Oh! wouldn't it be loverly.

Loverly, Loverly, Loverly...

'Medical Records Lament', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.34

The Medical Records Section of Canberra Hospital at the time of the 1992 Art in Working Life Project

With the intentions and time constraints of the project, it seemed most appropriate to give the material back to workers through a basic theatrical presentation. The program developed by the team included selections from *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, and live music from the musician. It brought out a wide range of voices from the Hospital workforce – from the switchboard to the kitchen, from the wards to the boiler room. The performance included stories like 'The Mystery of the Dead Man's Hands' which were presented by a single voice, as well as group pieces from various work areas which came to life through using several different voices for different points of view and impressions. Canberra Stereo Public Radio (now ArtSound FM), a local radio station interested in Canberra arts activities, recorded this material for broadcast and documentation.

The Art in Working Life Committee went on to become an officially constituted ACT Trades and Labour Council committee. It has continued to develop projects in workplace settings after this project, including a Trades and Labour Council choir, 'Union Voices', and further projects at the Hospital. Participants in these projects have since formed their own hospital choir.

Gatherings to Share Community Histories

DURING OUR WORK on the project, we held three gatherings to which we invited people interested in 'collecting and recording people's stories'. One, held in Heritage Week, shared and celebrated material collected at the Southside Community Festival. Two others were based on themes which we felt strongly related to Canberra stories: 'The Journey', and 'Building Canberra'.

The Library Service played an important role as a venue for these gatherings which were called 'Collecting and Recording People's Stories'. The network of branches offered us different locations around Canberra, and so provided the opportunity to draw in people from different localities, and put out wide-reaching publicity. As venues designed for public access and as well known landmarks in a locality, the different branch libraries were also easy for people to attend.

Ernst Frohlich telling his story of arrival in Canberra at a Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering

Some people came in anticipation of having an opportunity to tell their story:

> *My mother was a Londoner*
> *London at that time was the hub of the universe*
> *And she'd never lived in a tent.*
>
> *We were out at Duntroon*
>
> *It was very disorganised*
> *They had all the military houses built*
> *And they were building the civilian ones...*
>
> Marie Stoyles, *The Journey*, p.3

Others had begun or were interested in beginning projects recording stories:

> *I'm currently creating a portrait of Oaks Estate. I use the term portrait because I'm primarily a visual artist. Becoming involved in this portrait has introduced me to the medium of words and so the form of my work has taken a slight change. I suppose this is where my journey has brought me. Let me tell you about it and in so doing,*

let me tell you how working on this portrait has developed into a process of establishing roots within my newfound community.

Karen Williams, *The Journey*, p.11 (Karen completed her portrait of Oaks Estate in 1997.)

Each of the events we held was quite different but had a similar flavour of enjoyment. Often there was a strong sense of making connections — recognising stories, characters in the stories, filling in gaps about people and places, even discovering people not seen for many years.

We were initially enthusiastic about producing simple photocopied booklets of stories shared at these events, for distribution amongst people who came. In fact we only did that once, finding that the focus was much more people and their interaction around stories, rather than the stories themselves; a celebration in the moment, rather than for posterity. The gatherings were opportunities for people to find others with similar interests, to put down their names and addresses on a mailing list, to learn about other activities. They provided the catalyst for the formation of Canberra Stories Group (see Chapter Six).

At the time an interest in the history of Canberra was just emerging. This continues to grow. The new Canberra Museum and Gallery has plans for a centre to celebrate and encourage local heritage work. The National Trust shop at Old Parliament House can't get enough local history publications. In this context, the Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings and the day of memories at Manuka Pool played a significant role. They encouraged people to value their own memories of history, expressed in their own words and to appreciate the range of voices and understandings that have made and continue to make a local community. (See Chapter Seven for further discussion on local identity.)

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

October 1992 – the final Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering for the year. Whilst arranging the chairs I saw a woman who hadn't attended before come into the library to join us. She looked familiar. Then it came back to me – she was the woman I'd met coming back from Melbourne.

There are times when I reach out to the person sitting next to me on a plane. That afternoon I introduced myself and got a warm response from the woman next to me and she introduced me to the man on the other side, her brother. I recognised her first name, Effie, as being Greek, and she said yes, in fact it was, but she'd been born in Australia.

She and her brother were returning to Canberra, and she told me that she'd grown up in Queanbeyan. Her father had been one of the earliest Greek migrants to the area. He'd had a fruit shop in Monaro Street. It was part of the research into the family history that had brought them down to Melbourne. She'd been working on the project for some years now.

I told her about the work Mary and I were doing to support and encourage writing and publishing in the community, and said that we'd be happy to talk with her about her work if she ever wanted to. 'It's often helpful to be in contact with other people with similar interests and to have a look at models of what other people have done', I said. I told her about what a great network our Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings had become, and she gave me her address so I could put her on the mailing list.

Our meeting would have been at least a year before this gathering. I welcomed her and introduced her to Camilla and they sat down in the front row. I remember the beginning of the evening focusing on someone called 'the notorious Lasseter' who'd lived at Westlake – many of the participants seemed to have known of him. Things came round to Queanbeyan, and after hearing a very long story, to move things along, I asked whether there were other Queanbeyan stories, hoping to invite Effie to speak. She began the story of her Greek origins and the shop in Monaro Street. Her parents had been very busy with the business when she was little, and she remembered being devotedly looked after by a young girl who had been like a mother to her.

Her story was interrupted by an old woman sitting directly behind her in the second row, calling out, 'You were my baby! I was that girl who looked after you.' Everyone in the audience drew breath together. The woman leaned forward and Effie turned round and they looked at each other and reached out to embrace. The proceedings went on hold in a spellbound sort of way for some minutes.

Later, when I walked past them as they sat drinking tea together, the older woman was telling Effie that her favourite food when she was little had been squid. I could see she was going to be filled in on many details of her parents' lives.

Two Community Writing and Publishing Groups

PREPARING THE GROUND for independent community writing and publishing activity was an important aspect of our approach to 'Building Canberra'. We felt strongly that there was no sense in bringing skills in this field to people without the aim of developing at least one ongoing group which could bring together all that had been learnt and apply it in further work reflecting their own objectives. As it turned out, the two

groups which emerged from the project, Canberra Stories Group and Caring Words, had very different interests.

Canberra Stories Group emerged out of the enthusiasm and focus created by Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings and the publication of *Stories of the Inner South*. The second Southside Community Festival (1993) provided the opportunity for this group of individuals, all keen to continue collecting and recording people's stories, to use the scrapbook model of collection for their first publication, *My First Home in Canberra*. Meryl Hunter was an early member of the group.

> *For some time I had been writing in isolation — stories of my childhood in Canberra in the 1930s. To begin with these stories were for my family until I realised there was great community interest in early days in the infant capital. This was brought to my attention by the Community Literature Program and I was invited to read to a large audience on the lawns at Manuka Pool at the Southside Festival.*
>
> *From then on there were readings on public radio and readings under the banner of the Canberra Stories Group at both Belconnen and Kingston Libraries. Always there was enthusiastic feedback and support from those in the Community Literature Program. And I was no longer writing in isolation.*
>
> Meryl Hunter, 1993

Meryl has continued as an active member of Canberra Stories Group.

Caring Words came together through very different circumstances. In fact it was not something we had envisaged and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to respond to an interest that presented itself unexpectedly.

Members came together through making contact with the Community Literature Program because they wanted to write about their experience of disability, or caring for someone with a disability. After a number of meetings where they shared writing and talked about their writing interests and ambitions, they took up the idea of making a group publication of their work. The result was *Caring Words: life experiences in caring and coping*.

> *We are a disparate and unlikely group of seven, aged from late twenties to late seventies. Three of us have been caring for a partner with Alzheimer's disease. There is a young couple disabled by Cerebral Palsy, one of whom is a university graduate and both computer-literate. Another young woman is living with the debilitating illness, Lupus, and another has contended with years of Multiple Sclerosis... all of us with lively minds, coming together to discover each other, in the course of our common interest in writing...*
>
> 'About Ourselves', *Caring Words*

Members of Caring Words, as with any group, brought various skills from wider life experiences. One member was Keris Delaney who has had a long career in community arts, and at the time was working on the initial development of the ACT branch of Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia (DADAA) Network.

A most valuable part of Caring Words' activity was a review of their experience of making a book together – *History of Caring Words*. This provided us with valuable material on which to draw in *Out of the Ordinary* (see Chapter Six). The group did not continue their formal association after their first publication, but on the basis of their experience advised others – 'Give it a go!'

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Working with stories in groups

Bringing People Together in Groups

Moving Beyond the Initial Group Activity

Encouraging Stories

Highlighting the Stories that have been Shared

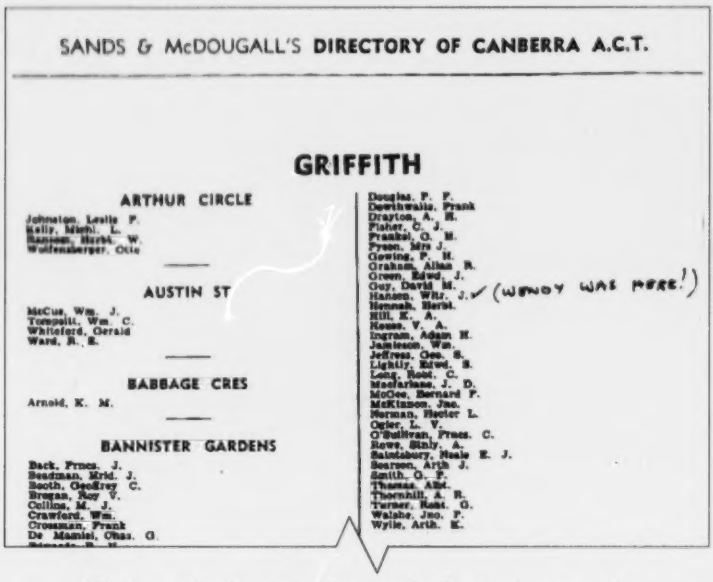
Hosting Comfortable Community Gatherings

Scheming and Plotting

THIS CHAPTER presents ideas for community writing and publishing activities which can be used in a variety of community settings. Aspects will be useful to anyone working with groups of adults on creative projects, including those involved in oral history, adult literacy, reminiscence work, community development or community arts.

Here we outline the way we worked with stories in groups as a three-part process – bringing people together, encouraging story sharing and highlighting stories that have been shared. In addition there are some notes about managing successful gatherings.

Finally, because planning is so important in developing effective group activities, we talk about matters of 'scheming and plotting', and include a list of suggested steps through an activity from the beginning to the end.


SANDS & McDOUGALL'S **DIRECTORY OF CANBERRA A.C.T.**

GRIFFITH

ARTHUR CIRCLE

Johnston, Leslie F.
Kelly, Michl. L.
Manson, Hubt. W.
Wolfensberger, Otto

AUSTIN ST

McCue, Wm. J.
Tomsett, Wm. C.
Whiteford, Gerald
Ward, R., E.

BABBAGE CRES

Arnold, K. M.

BANNISTER GARDENS

Back, Fredc. J.
Beadman, Kfrd. J.
Booth, Geoffrey C.
Brogan, Roy V.
Collins, M. J.
Crawford, Wm.
Crossman, Frank
De Maniel, Chas. G.

Douglas, F. F.
Duthwaite, Frank
Drayton, A. H.
Fisher, C. J.
Frankel, O. H.
Fyson, Mrs J.
Gowing, F. H.
Graham, Allan R.
Green, Edwd. J.
Guy, David M.
Hansen, Wltr. J. ✓ (WENDY WAS HERE!)
Hemmah, Hertst.
Hill, E. A.
Hosse, V. A.
Ingram, Adam H.
Jamieson, Wm.
Jeffres, Geo. S.
Lightly, Edwd. S.
Long, Robt. C.
Macfarlane, J. D.
McGee, Bernard F.
McKinnon, Jno.
Norman, Hector L.
Ogier, L. V.
O'Sullivan, Fredc. C.
Rowe, Shly, A.
Salisbury, Neale E. J.
Searson, Arth J.
Smith, O. F.
Thomas, Alst.
Thornhill, A. R.
Turner, Robt. G.
Walshe, Jno. F.
Wylie, Arth. E.

'Wendy was here' — a participant makes her mark on an early Canberra street directory

Bringing People Together in Groups

THE FIRST STEP in bringing people together is to get a sense of where community resources lie in terms of groups, enthusiastic individuals and meeting places. Once ready to begin your work, there are a few elements worth considering in developing a successful practice with a group. Setting a comfortable tone at the first meeting, fitting in with the group, starting out gradually and showing how each activity is going to work — these are all ways of allaying people's fears of becoming involved.

Looking at Community Resources: People and Places Where They Meet

Many of us know that sharing stories is an activity which inspires fascination, excitement and love. Yet the opportunities to join others specifically to hear and tell stories of our lives are few and far between. Older people in the community, who are often already meeting in groups and taking the time to sit and talk, are a terrific resource when developing interest in story sharing in the wider community.

For example, when we set about preparing for the Southside Community Festival we looked at the contacts we already had in the area. Many of the clients of Narrabundah Health Centre had lived in the area for many years. In deciding to work with these people we were rewarded with many stories in which people claimed their status as early residents,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

including many memories of the small-town quality of Canberra in the early days:

> *Heather Menzies got married sometime in the 'fifties.*
> *The train bringing some of the guests got derailed*
> *at Fyshwick.*
> *No one got hurt, just some of the wheels came*
> *off the line.*
> *It was a public event — everyone went up and*
> *had a look.*
>
> Arthur Reynell, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.11

Although many of the frail aged people we met and talked to were not physically able to attend the Southside Festival, they thoroughly enjoyed contributing to it. They also offered us a valuable resource in encouraging others to come along to the Festival and contribute their stories.

We've found that activities which bring out stories in a group also strengthen the confidence of individuals and the group they are part of. They cut across beliefs participants may have that their experience of life is not really significant, the anxiety that their way of expressing themselves isn't good enough and the belief that there is no-one who will listen. Gradually group members move from these feelings of nervousness to telling and finding that their story is part of a significant and quite extraordinary conversation. In this way a group is a resource for its own activities. Each person has something valuable to share and each person is a potential audience to others.

Making contact with individuals who are not members of a group may be achieved through local publicity which encourages and values stories people may offer (see below). Quite a few people were drawn to write in a scrapbook we set up alongside a display in the local Kingston Library, and this started the ball rolling prior to the Southside Festival. It also put us in touch with someone who supported the idea of recording stories of an area which was rapidly developing and changing. Her knowledge of the Inner South area was particularly valuable months later when we came to edit *Stories of the Inner South* — the book of stories collected on the day (see Chapter Two for full details).

Approaching community meeting places such as neighbourhood centres, libraries and community day centres for the elderly can be an excellent starting point for working with stories in the community. We have found that whenever we have proposed bringing people together around story sharing at these local centres, staff and public have been supportive and responsive. An advantage of starting this way is that it is not complex to organise. It is not necessary to take on the same level of promotion that is needed to draw the community (in a generalised sense) into participating in new activities.

The preparatory work we did for the Festival with the Health Centre and the Library was the beginning of an on-going relationship with both places. Later, when we staged an event featuring readings from the Festival activity, the Library was eager to host the evening and the Health Centre let people know about it. When we came to sell *Stories of the Inner South*, both organisations were important allies – in support, publicity and sales.

Fitting in With the Framework of the Group

An important part of starting to work with any group is to find out what is best for them. In all established groups there are routines involving the range of activities people do, the time at which they do them and the way in which people relate to each other in the course of the time they are together.

A walking group is quite different from a large hospital, yet what needs to be taken into account is very similar. Within the normal routines, where is the place in which people may be drawn out and connect with each other's stories? Walking group stories are best heard while walking. A hospital is an extremely busy workplace and everyone is on different shifts over a period of time. We held short, one-off workshops with specific workgroups and circulated scrapbooks to different work areas. Together with our co-workers we set up in the canteen – a high traffic area visited by all sections of the workforce. At the Festival, an outdoor event, people came together because we made a place for them to gather, with displays and scrapbooks of writing and photographs to gather around.

Meeting People Where They Are

What is most important to us in bringing people together is that people feel good about what we are doing. People almost always feel easier about being invited to contribute if they have an opportunity to see how an activity is going to work. For instance when we first went out to meet seniors at the Narrabundah Health Centre, participants were set at ease when they knew they wouldn't be expected to say anything straight off, but could gently find their way into the activity by listening to readings which had some connection to their own lives. They found themselves responding, and it was not long before they were sparking off each other. We had also let the group know that we had come prepared to write their stories down, and this allayed fears of being asked themselves to write when they might not have enjoyed it in the past or might not have done it for a long time (for more about scribing see Chapter Four).

At the start of a project, or when first meeting as a group, it's unlikely that many people will want to make a large contribution or one that strongly identifies them. The invitation to offer a phrase or a small memory is sufficient at the

beginning – it allows people to test the water and take up the idea more fully if it feels right. Some people may choose never to become very actively involved, but enjoy being part of the group activity nonetheless, listening and responding to what others contribute. Others may seem not to be involved and then unexpectedly tell their story when they are ready. In sharing stories it is more comfortable if participants are in a position to choose how little or how much they will offer. What we have learned is that people respond positively when they are invited to see their story sharing as part of the work of a group, whereas they would be put off if there was any suggestion that their contribution had to stand on its own. It is our challenge when introducing our work to make apparent the collective nature of the enterprise and the joy that this stands to bring everyone.

In the context of the Hospital project where people were anxious about the political implications of voicing their opinions, contributors chose to remain anonymous. As the focus was on people at work, the job or workplace situation was often the most meaningful way of identifying material. For instance the parody of 'Wouldn't it be Loverly', which we quoted in Chapter Two, addressed the problems workers in the Medical Records Section were having with their work space, and was adequately identified as 'Medical Records' Lament'. We found that alphabets and lists under topics like 'what's in your day?', which could include contributions from a number of individuals, also worked well in this context. Titles of these included 'Payroll's Alphabet', and 'What Do Nurses Do?' (We expand on these techniques in Chapter Four.)

Our experience is that the content of stories will deepen over time. The examples below show the contrast between two stories recorded at an early and later stage of our relationship with Nancy at the Narrabundah Walking Group.

I came in 1950 to Narrabundah
When I arrived here it was just fields.
This was the primary school
Here there were horses and sheep.

'A Walk Which Took Us Back – Early Spring 1991',
Group Walks Around Narrabundah, p.4

They say to me
Where do you get this recipe?
I say, it's a starvation recipe
When you've got nothing in the house
An orange, a lemon, a bit of olive oil
Cut the lemon or orange
Then a little bit of water – cold water
Mix in the oil
And then you dip in your bread

And eat
If we had nothing to cook
No pasta or bread
We used to get flour
Stir with water, like cream
And many times you have to put a brick on your stomach to sleep
'Mum, we're still hungry!'
'Put a brick on top'
This was Sicily

Nancy Sykes, *Narrabundah Walking Group Scrapbook*

Moving Beyond the Initial Group Activity

THE 'GRADUAL BEGINNING' APPROACH we have described allows people to feel at ease in a new activity and take stock of its potential for them. They can then begin to sense the possibilities of more extended and complex activities – for example making a publication, taking part in longer-term activities which bring in members of different groups, or establishing themselves as a community writing and publishing group. These activities may amount to more fully developed projects for which it may be appropriate to consider working with a writer and/or applying for financial support (see Chapters Five and Six).

A relatively simple way of developing an activity when people are keen to continue is to give it a public identity. This may be achieved by offering a series of open meetings under the umbrella of an overall theme or title. As well as consolidating the activity and giving it a stronger community presence, such an extension also has the value of exploring the potential of a long-term project and may broaden and deepen the material for a publication.

We set up the public Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings at the Kingston Library with the intention of drawing in people who had already participated in the early stages of the 'Building Canberra' project. Many of these people had encountered story-sharing activities on their own turf and were now familiar with what was involved. People, who earlier would have been nervous of attending a public gathering and would not have seen themselves as having anything to offer, now felt confident to join in something previously outside their experience. People who had not been part of any activity before also attended in response to public notices.

In this situation, new combinations of people and stories heightened the experience and encouraged people to think of ways in which they might pursue their interests independently.

(We discuss examples of these in Chapter Six.) Others used the events as a way of networking on individual projects and developing their own resources and confidence.

Another way of bringing people together is to offer an opportunity for people with similar interests to get together. The formation of the group Caring Words is an example of this process (see Chapter Two and Chapter Six).

Encouraging Stories

RECOLLECTIONS AND STORIES are often sparked off when a listener recognises something in another person's account. For example, Hazel from the Narrabundah Walking Group told her story of what it was like to come to Canberra and enjoy the blossoms after the experience of war in England, and this reminded Annie of how peaceful and safe living in Canberra felt after South Africa. So one story connects with another.

In this section we talk about creating a context for remembering, and ways of drawing people into thoughts and experiences which they might not ordinarily think of. We found that the careful use of publicity material, and shaping the content of the activity through readings and themes, plus drawing on the local environment and the skills of people who are natural tellers, all opened the way for stories. We also used various simple group writing methods as a way of getting memories and impressions onto paper.

Publicity Material

Flyers and publicity material can help generate stories. The flyer for the Southside Community Festival, headed 'Memories at Manuka Pool' showed an old photo of the Kingston shops, and included memory joggers under the heading 'what do you remember of ...'. For those who had known the area in the early days it was a reminder of how the Inner South had lost its status as the central focus of Canberra in the developments of the '60s, '70s and '80s.

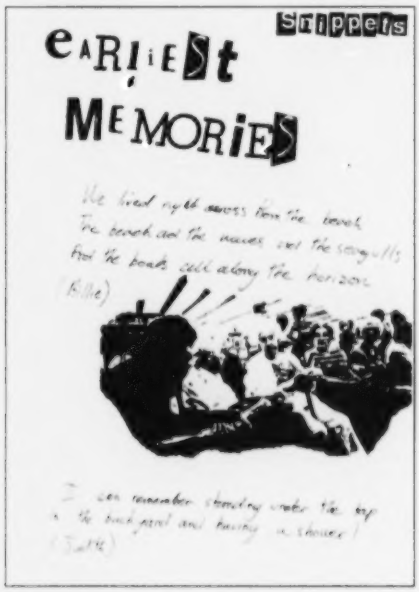
A flyer we made for one of the Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings invited people into the activity by stimulating their memories and imaginations with this story:

Why not try Canberra?, my brother said
– it's developing
My father was a master builder in Sydney
just establishing his trade
By the record it was 1926 – heading for depresssion
So he did come

His first big contract was to build a hundred houses
in Reid
And there's a wonderful story about that

Heather Hunt,
Stories Told by Members of Narrabundah Evergreen Senior Citizens Club and Thursday Walking Group for Memories at Manuka Pool, p.7

For the Kirra memories sessions our 'Snippets' flyers, composed of short pieces from the previous session, celebrated the wealth of stories in the group:



At the Hospital we used the first group poem composed in a Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) meeting, 'The Main Entrance', as publicity for the project.

Yellow
Blue
Red
Pink
White
Coats
Flurrying backwards and forwards
Jangling IDs, stethoscopes, fob watches, nurses' badges
Busy thoroughfare
Patients in beds being wheeled through.

The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital, p.8

Scrapbooks and displays offer another form of publicity material. As we've mentioned, the scrapbook in the Kingston Library worked well as an invitation to people to engage with and continue something that had already been started, such as material we had collected from the Narrabundah Health Centre group, and photographs from archival collections.

Shaping the Content of the Activity — Readings

Offering readings is a good warm-up to inviting stories from the group and, we found, works in almost any setting. Being read to is a pleasure and suggests to people that they may have an active role as interested listeners if they do not feel inclined to contribute. We would arrive at a group meeting prepared with selected readings such as extracts from anthologies, life stories, or other community publications. We also sometimes chose poetry or material from novels. Here is one reading we've used:

> *Paddy's Markets*
> *Fruit and vegetables in baskets and baskets*
> *Rows and rows of them*
> *All with tickets on*
> *The Quay, the big boats going in and out*
> *I love looking at the schooners going in and out*
> *I love looking at the Manly boat*
> *Sitting on the side...*
>
> Dorothy Catford, *You Can't Get Rid of the Old Ones: poems from Sydney nursing homes*, p.46

In selecting readings we chose stories in which participants might recognise elements of their own life experience. This was also a useful way for people to begin to appreciate the nature of both story and text. When we invited response people would often quite spontaneously find themselves sharing what had come to mind. We found that even quite shy people would take up the invitation to contribute, on the basis of adding to a body of knowledge unfamiliar to a younger generation, or setting the record straight.

At the Kirra memories session called 'Going Out and Having Fun', we read from a Tasmanian community publication:

> *I used to walk to dances around here. I'd walk to Underwood, Karoola, Tunnel and Lebrina. Dance all night, then walk home again. Probably pick up two or three girls along the way – spin 'em around 'til the sun got up, then we thought about comin' home. Get home, watch around to see my grandfather comin' out. See him comin' round, so I'd slip in and go to bed. He'd come back in the house and call out, 'Gettin' up are you?' We were just gettin' in!*

They were good times. We enjoyed ourselves. We made our fun — did no damage. No mischief or anything.

Patrick Keith Garcia, *Lilies of the Valley*, p.63

Soon people were talking about their different memories of going out. Many from rural backgrounds identified with walking to dances, but those from cities began talking about dances in the city and going to the cinema:

I didn't grow up here
I grew up in England
There you'd pay threepence for a hard seat

Winifred, *Unfolding Memories*, p.26

The price of a cinema ticket then reminded others of what they'd seen at the movies and so on. These men and women had often said that they didn't have any stories, yet through the readings of other people's they were reminded of their own. Having access to these various stories through the Community Writing Collection (see Chapter One) greatly helped us in drawing on material which would otherwise have been hard to find.

Displaying writing is another way of engaging people in the stories of others. Large pieces of writing blu-tacked to walls in the canteen offered quick readings to people standing in lines for tea when we worked at the Hospital.

At the Southside Community Festival the scrapbooks offered reading material. We greeted those tentatively approaching our stall, 'Have a read! Listen to this!' We would hold out a scrapbook, they would become involved in it and we would see their faces light up as they read something which they thought only they were familiar with.

Offering experiences, descriptions and impressions through readings sparks an imaginative impulse. People's responses are distinctive, rich and varied. Readings are also an ideal way to work in group settings. We believe that the interaction that develops through them is equally pleasurable and meaningful to participants and is a more satisfying approach than question and answer activity. Furthermore, working with readings, as with themes, suggests that stories are shareable and completely avoids any idea that one is prying for personal information.

George and Nancy Sykes of the Narrabundah Walking Group described how the group's process of remembering took place in the spirit of friendship, suggesting that telling stories is a natural way of keeping friendship:

I want to tell stories
As we talk
We eat, we talk
We keep the friendship

George and Nancy Sykes, *Mary's Walking Group notebook*

Another thing we'd like to emphasise about encouraging stories through text is that it is a way of bringing experience into the moment as something that is felt. In this feeling of another's experience, people find the pleasure and surprise of making connections and finding their own memories. They will be quick to pinpoint differences and shape their own stories in response.

Visual material such as photographs may be used in the same spirit as readings to encourage viewers' own memories. The interest here is not the photograph or item itself but what it prompts in the viewer's own imagination. For instance, at our last Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering, we invited people to bring photos for display as part of the event. We pinned these up as people arrived and they provided a great focus for conversation and connection between people. If we had taken down some of the stories from this conversation we would have had a fascinating and varied record of the participants' experiences and impressions of Canberra.

Shaping the Content of the Activity — Themes

In working with the Kirra participants, we found that themes provided a focus for remembering and gave a satisfying shape to each story-sharing experience. However, in order to be productive, themes must invite people from different backgrounds and life experiences to tell their stories. One of the richest themes which we explored was wartime memories. For many of the participants, war had occupied an extremely important time of their lives. The session was an explosion of stories from enormously different circumstances — reflecting the different experiences of men and women, the experiences of people with Australian and European backgrounds, and the various ages represented in the group.

The thematic context of the session stimulated Alf to remember something completely unexpected at a time when Alzheimer's disease was beginning to make it hard for him to remember anything:

Mr Brown	*19 Rudheath Avenue*	*Killed*
Mr Wilson	*8 Rudheath Avenue*	*Killed*
Mrs Horn	*11 Woodnorth Road*	*Killed*
Mrs	*50 Woodnorth Road*	*Killed*

Shrapnel in gardens
This shrapnel bomb dropped in school
Planes over Manchester
Plane in playground

Alf, *Unfolding Memories*, p.9

His wife had helped him to get down on paper the memory he had uncovered. She reflected on the value of having recorded this memory later:

When you consider what a person has experienced in their entire lifetime, to simply choose three words, 'killed, killed, killed', gives you a sense of how sensitive the person was at the time, and what an impact the event must have had on him.

Annie's notebook

Considering the Locality

Place may be a strong generator of stories. It is very satisfying to work with story in places which hold strong community memories – it feels so right to people to share stories in the place where they are situated. As Paul Rodda, a librarian we were working with said, 'Everyone can relate to Manuka Pool because everyone used to go there'.

In the context of that neighbourhood we came upon a rich seam when a shop owner began talking about the tenants in the Manuka Arcade. He remembered Miss Bain and recalled her sense of rivalry with the shopkeeper on the opposite side of the arcade. His story prompted many memories of one of the great local characters of the '40s and '50s.

Miss Bain of course, and Miss Campbell
on the other side
When you bought something from Miss Campbell
You bought it under the watchful eye of Miss Bain
They were sort of haberdasher's shops –
Miss Campbell more or less went in for clothing

Mick O'Brien, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.18

This fragment sparked off delighted remembering of Miss Bain's many eccentricities.

She knew where everything was. Right from the ground to the ceiling was boxes, right round and at the end. There were boxes of different sizes and shapes and there was no logic because she often had socks in cotton boxes, and the big boxes were often on top. But she knew.

Carol Mackay (Christian), *Stories of the Inner South*, p.19

Ruth was always a very intimidating character to children and adults alike as she towered over us all standing behind the counter with her watery eyes and very very prominent teeth.

Shirley Cummings (Deane), *Stories of the Inner South*, p.18

Making the Most of Natural Story Tellers

Some people are natural story tellers. Drawing on what such natural tellers offer, in terms of their enjoyment of stories and encouragement to others, is very rewarding. Their stories can generate a mood of talking and remembering which assists others to come out with their impressions. At the Narrabundah Walking Group the initial meetings focused on the stories of Nancy and George. Their stories were entertaining and covered a broad range of life experience, and had clearly had this role in the group before we came in. Gradually, telling was taken up by the group as a whole.

Simple Group Writing Activities

A piece of group writing is always a good starting point in bringing out stories because it only asks for a one-line or even one-word contribution from each individual – not too demanding for people in a hurry or those who don't see themselves as having a lot to offer. Another advantage of group pieces is that people can decide to identify themselves to whatever extent they choose with what they have contributed. What finally comes together is something which tells more about the situation than could be told by an individual voice. We provide detailed suggestions for simple group writing activities in Chapter Four.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

Ann Armstrong, chief librarian at Belconnen, had grown up in a country town – this may have given her a sense of the possibilities of creating community through the library. The first bridge she'd built across the concrete expanse of the town centre was in the form of a Christmas event involving the florist and the cheese shop and the Kirra Centre. Then she moved on to bringing the elders across for a good morning tea followed by entertainment. Mary and I were audience members at the first sessions.

As a result of our involvement the emphasis shifted from the majority of the entertainment being prepared by the assistant librarian, Patsy Allan, and a group of others, towards an exploration of what the stories were in the group. 'A Dramatic Moment in Time' was the theme

we chose for the first 'memory session'. What stands out for me about that morning is the almost unbearable tension everybody went through as we put into practice this new direction. The rhythm of the first sessions had been fast paced, the tone bright. Now we were asking the group, does-anyone have a story?

Patsy told her story of the Newcastle earthquake, warming people up to the theme. Then we had to wait. It was hard not to want to feel nostalgic for the up-tempo mood which characterised the skits and group singing simply for the sake of getting free of the intense discomfort of the unknown. What would happen if no-one responded? It was hard not to encourage or even demand – there must be someone out there who has a story!

Eve Warren, a worker from the Centre was the one who stepped into the breach. Her story was of her first day at school. Looking back on it, the theme and the gruelling nature of her experience perfectly reflected the situation in which the Kirra people now found themselves. Lost in unfamiliar territory with a disquieting performance anxiety. But it was a very funny story and people relaxed somewhat. The silence became more reflective, though there was still no sense of how the gathering would move on to its expressed intention. Would any of those we'd seen as our 'target group' take the risk of speaking?

A woman towards the back put her hand up. She told about how as a child she'd been dared to jump into a fishpond and swim in it. She'd killed all the goldfish and squashed the waterlilies. 'To this day, if someone dares me, I still, if I possibly can, have a go at it', her story concluded. The unfolding of the stories had begun.

From these clumsy beginnings a tradition of inclusiveness had also come into being where workers found a space to tell their stories as well. Eve realised her story was worth putting down on paper and it was included in Stories of the Inner South. *Gradually a few members of the community who felt that these simple times of story sharing fulfilled something of real importance to them began joining in the sessions. At each event an atmosphere which married excitement and feelings of safety and appreciation made borrowers at the non-fiction shelves nearby stop and wonder.*

Highlighting the Stories that have been Shared

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL moments in the process of working with stories in a group is reading aloud or displaying the stories which have been collected. When a teller hears a story which seemed only personally important to them read back publicly, after an interval of time, in the context of a range of other stories, it can have a strong impact. It affirms

that they have something to tell. This in turn provides a stronger context for telling and remembering in future.

In the section on scribing in Chapter Four we show how reading people back their stories and asking for further developments or corrections is part of the process of story making. Here we are concerned with the completion of the activity. At this stage there are two important considerations. One is when and where you offer people the option of making their story public for the first time. The other concerns authorship and the question of ownership, and implicit in this is the right not to make material publicly available.

The Right Time and Place

Highlighting the stories that have been shared is an occasion. How it is done will vary according to the people involved and their setting. Readings from the scrapbook were a regular feature of morning tea at the Narrabundah Walking Group. One of the nicest walks we went on was to Elizabeth and Rocco Costa's garden. They had loaded us up with carrier bags full of sweet black grapes and pears to take back to the Health Centre, and while everyone feasted we read out some of what had been said in the garden:

> *This is a pepper, very hot – piquante*
> *I put in jars, preserve with vinegar*
> *See – dried first*
> *After in the olio.*
>
> *Oh these are hot! Mama mia!*
> *My daughter-in-law from Calabria put them*
> *once in spaghetti*
> *Oh hot!*
>
> 'The Walk That Led To The Costas' Garden – Summer 1992', *Group Walks around Narrabundah*, p.6

At the readings there was enthusiastic recognition of each individual's story and characteristics of speech and at that point additions and revisions were made. With each reading more material was added to the group scrapbook. As the year went on members of the group got a stronger sense of the value of making a publication. (We discuss this process in more detail in Chapter Seven.)

In the more public setting of the Southside Community Festival, stories from the day were read by us and contributors as part of performance activities on the Festival stage. This offered participants a first taste of a quite extensive audience – the pride and enthusiasm that was generated prepared the way for a publication with a wide readership.

The Question of Ownership

In a sense it may be said that we *are* our stories. So it is vital that individuals retain control of the stories they offer to a story-sharing activity. Although many contributors may not see this as an issue in the first place, an interesting result of highlighting the stories that have been shared is that people start to see their text as something that stands alone, and of which they are the author (see also Chapter Seven). Giving due care and consideration to what is involved in making a story available to a wider audience is an important feature of developing the trust that is necessary to successfully maintain community writing activity.

The 'Building Canberra' project generated hundreds of stories. They were contributed to a communal enterprise in the spirit of sharing and broadening understanding of the personal experience of living in Canberra. Yet it would be inappropriate to think that individual rights over stories melted into the general pool of good will which was created.

The principle of individual control over the text that she or he has created is an important part of working with people's stories. Copyright law supports individual ownership of material and requires permission for use or publication to be sought from the author. We found that, far from introducing a disturbing formality into our activities, working with the idea of copyright usefully clarified the relationship firstly, between individuals and their stories and secondly, between those stories and any publication project (see more about permission to publish in Chapter Five).

In effect this formal process is a way of making the move from an immediate to a wider audience clear to participants and contributors. Part of this clarification may involve an author's decision to hold back their material. This right must be respected. When we sought permission from people we'd worked with to publish some of their stories in *Out of the Ordinary*, we found one author quite disturbed by the prospect of her contribution going beyond the group scrapbook — what that story meant to her and what it meant to us were two very different things.

Hosting Comfortable Community Gatherings

THE KIND OF GATHERINGS which we held during the 'Building Canberra' project brought together people with similar interests from a wide variety of backgrounds. As the hosts we wanted people to feel that they had been invited to a friendly but special event. Finding a venue people would feel at ease in, choosing a good facilitator of the program, welcoming people and providing food and entertainment all contributed.

Introducing people who may have common interests, though they would not normally meet, is the beginning of setting up networks. Structuring the form of the gathering so that a range of voices is heard encourages inclusiveness. It is worth acknowledging, however, that events which are fully inclusive of people with a range of backgrounds and experiences may not be achievable overnight or in a one-off situation.

Meeting Place

At the beginning of this chapter we talked about making use of local meeting places. Seek out a place that is part of the larger community fabric. For us the local library provided a good spot with a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. It was carpeted, there was a variety of seating available, and people were coming and going. As one librarian commented, 'I think they're good places, libraries, they're meeting places and they're not highbrow'. Our group activities became part of the mainstream of community life in the library.

Skilled Facilitators for Public Events

A skilled facilitator can keep track of the program, invite readings and stories from the group, integrate everything that is shared, and can give an event a warm and well-hosted quality to which people look forward to returning. Having this responsibility taken care of frees you up to do other things.

The facilitator can accommodate different styles of telling and sharing. Some people may feel more comfortable having someone else read their story. Sometimes they may choose to have a friend read it, or else the facilitator might introduce the person and read the story.

For the Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings, we invited Hec McMillan, a local actor, to chair the sessions. Hec had come to Canberra as a child himself and had seen the changes which people were recounting. He was able to refer to his own experiences, tell a good story, and was skilled in encouraging others to share their experiences.

Getting Everyone Comfortable

When we planned the Collecting and Recording People's Stories gatherings we realised that many people in the group would not have met before. We always made sure we were organised by the time people arrived so we could introduce them to each other, and help them feel at home in an unfamiliar group setting.

A practical way we found of easing the strangeness of sharing stories with new people in a public setting was to focus on the activity itself. On a display table we would have a scrapbook with stories that had already been collected. If anyone had brought photos or copies of documentary material we'd offer to photocopy it and put it in the book. We'd also invite

them to read the book and make additional entries if they wanted to. This engaged people in story sharing straight away and people would strike up conversations and discover connections before the main proceedings actually began. It also started and developed the process of collecting material for a publication.

We gave quite a lot of thought to how seating arrangements would work best for large gatherings. Arranging things so that people can move out of the group to occupy a central position when telling makes sense as this offers the audience a better chance of seeing and hearing the speaker. A simple amplifier with a microphone plugged into it also makes things much easier for both speakers and listeners.

It is worth mentioning, however, some of the things that come into play when events involve people with special physical needs. Finding space for wheelchairs can mean using a very much larger area than if you are only accommodating chairs. It can be awkward for people to come out of a group to use a microphone. Yet people with hearing problems may become frustrated or simply tune out if they can't hear – these are practical questions which may not be easily resolved in groups where some people are hard of hearing and others are not at all agile.

Making people comfortable in a practical sense certainly eases them into a gathering and creates an atmosphere that is receptive to the stimulation and generating of stories. It is important for a meeting to be open and informal enough to allow time for networking, information sharing and exploring ideas together. We found that one and a half to two hours was a good time to allow for a group of people to break the ice and get flowing, with time for tea and moving around in small conversational groups a delightful part of this.

Food and Entertainment

It creates a good atmosphere to share food together. The delicious cakes we have eaten together at gatherings with the Kirra group, the grapes which someone set on the scrapbook table at the Manuka Pool, the healthy morning teas created by the Walking Group all made people feel good, and eager to share more together.

At story-sharing gatherings it is worthwhile seeing whether music can be part of the proceedings. In one example, Chrissie Shaw, a local performer, sang about the connection of the electricity at Oaks' Estate, a suburb of Canberra, at the gathering 'Our First Home in Canberra'. It reminded people of that time, stimulated the group and broadened the evening's entertainment. It began:

In the days before the electric light,
a lantern just had to do

By the friendly glow of a candle's flame,
we'd see the evening through.

I suppose we went to bed early then,
or sat around the fire

And when it was warm we'd gather outside
And watch the moon and the stars galore,
Circling round the sky.

Chrissie Shaw, *The Day They Turned on the Electric Light*

Scheming and Plotting

CLEAR PLANNING goes hand in hand with working creatively with limited resources. In this section we provide a list of suggested steps through an activity and look at some particular aspects of planning that apply to community arts work.

One of the most important things in our experience is making sure that what has been planned meets the needs of the situation as it develops. This means planning as an ongoing practice, taking time to review and bring one's growing experience of a project into the process. On another front, paying attention to issues such as time frames and communication has important payoffs in work which is carried out with small budgets, does not have a high profile in the community and depends on broad-based support.

Working on projects that are specially funded involves another dimension of planning thinking. (For information about budgeting and the planning involved in deciding to work with a writer, see Chapter Six.) Documentation of expenditure of funds allocated is also usually required. An evaluation appropriate to the project and documentation of the celebration (see p.53) provides a strong basis for a final report of this nature.

A Realistic Time Frame

Starting a timeline is useful in the initial planning stage of a project. A timeline differs from a calendar in that it is set out on a horizontal line and the only dates that are included are the dates that are significant to the project. We find this actively focuses us on the timespan of the project, on the sequence of events ahead and their relationship to each other. Some of the events relating to publicity that might be marked on a timeline would be the date a publicity flyer has to be complete, the date on which it has to be handed in for mailouts, the date that press releases have to go out, and so on.

In broader planning terms a timeline can show quite clearly that it is just not possible to fit another thing into a project. There is no more time. As such it is a vital reference point in any review

planning work. Never have any concluding event too close to the end of the line or there will be no days left for finishing off, let alone creating documentation or writing reports.

It makes good sense to leave open spaces on this linear map of the work ahead, even though it might seem more secure to have a lot filled in. The nature of this kind of creative work is that it generates new possibilities. We weren't sure what our memories stall at the Southside Community Festival would produce. It was only when we had the material and we knew people were excited about the idea of a book that we could see what the most appropriate sort of publication would be. In a context where we were investigating these processes and had an organisation prepared to take a small financial risk behind us, we decided to step into a process that we knew involved unknowns and more work than we really had time for.

It is through the experience of doing much more work to complete a funded project than was budgeted for that one learns to leave larger spaces available for follow-ups or interesting extra possibilities that may emerge. In community arts projects nurturing people's interest may initially be a slow process. But from our experience, work with very tentative beginnings can develop exponential energy and potential as the weeks go by. People who start off apprehensive and anxious about participating tend to be quite lively and very ready to offer their story by the time the project is winding up.

Funding is discussed in more depth in Chapter Six, but here it is worth mentioning that how applicants plan is of vital interest to the Community Cultural Development Fund. The Fund wants people to be able to explain what they plan to do, how they plan to do it and how the community will be involved.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

My image of Mary and me in planning mode is with a pot of Earl Grey tea between us – at Clarries' Cafe or Cafe Lella, at Kingston, Tuggeranong and Belconnen libraries, at her house, at my house. We have done and continue to do a lot of planning together.

Probably the most important thing we have learnt in the process is that good planning has always made things run smoothly for us, and contributed to more enjoyment and less panic.

I think that we continue to get wiser about the importance of defining our purpose when we are planning. In deciding what we would include in the project 'Building Canberra', in putting on events, in choosing how we would go about stimulating stories and working with groups, we have often come to a point when we have needed to ask each other what we are trying to achieve by organising things a certain way or giving something a particular title. This clarification has always been helpful.

A couple of things which I brought to our planning were the ideas of checking in, and of using a timeline. 'Checking in', by taking five minutes each at the beginning of each meeting to talk about how we were or to mention anything preoccupying us, helped us to focus our attention before embarking on a demanding session of planning. We still do this each time we get together to work on the book and find it always helps to enrich the quality of our meetings. Timelines gave us a clear picture on paper of important tasks and the dates by which they needed to be done.

Our greatest planning failure was that we never got our terrific mailing list onto a data base. This gave us a lot of work, and to me illustrates that it is very important in planning, to allow time for work which is not in response to a particular event, but will give you the administrative capacity to maintain your work.

FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

One of my strongest memories of working with Annie is being summonsed to the timeline. 'Mary we've got to do a timeline on this!' And she'd be there with a diary and a calendar, prepared to plot what would happen when. Being one of those over-optimistic people who always wants to do more than is possible in a given time, the reality of dates, weeks, hours, and competing tasks is something I have to grit my teeth for. Some of my dreams are going to go up in smoke. But part of my feeling is relief. A timeline offers a real vision, not just a pipe dream; something that will happen because achievable steps have been marked out for you to follow.

Setting up Communications

Many community arts projects by definition require a complex joint effort between different sorts of organisations, between individuals and organisations, between small groups and government agencies. From our experience and in the requirements of funding bodies, coherent management of a project involves setting up communication channels in a deliberate and representative way. Forming a committee to see through the planning and execution of a project makes sure that time and space is set aside for people to express opinions and offer information, and that the process is visible to all concerned. It is an opportunity for people with distinct interests to come together over something they have in common.

At the Hospital, the Art in Working Life Committee formed the basis of the organisation of the project. The committee was a group of union representatives and artsworkers who began working together out of their interest in developing an Art in

Working Life project in the ACT. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and the Health Services Union (HSU) were the largest unions involved, and they looked at the possibility of collaborating on a project in a workplace where there were large groupings of members of both unions employed. This led to the committee choosing the Hospital as the venue for the project.

The value of the exploratory work of the committee was that a commitment to the project developed amongst a variety of groups. Each representative had an understanding of the role they were to play, and went on to communicate with their members. As the project progressed and the possibility of offering the material back to the workers in the form of a performance emerged, committee members took on the tasks involved in seeing this idea through. Later they looked out for other opportunities to put on the performance at conferences and gatherings, and continued to be involved in our work. The HSU representative on the committee took an active interest in our decision to write this book.

The development of a successful committee starts out with the way people are approached to be part of it. Most people want to know that meetings will not stretch out for hours. Let each person know that they are wanted for the particular interests and skills they will bring to the continuing planning process. At the first meeting get everyone to say something about themselves and what has brought them along. Such introductions are an essential part of making lasting connections and it is worth devoting a good part of the first meeting to them. It is also important to allow plenty of time for people to ask questions. Bear in mind that at the beginning it may be hard to put forward clearly formulated goals because what is appropriate, achievable and of most interest to people will become more visible as participation in the activity develops. In a situation where there is a well-known, shared intention it is still important to ask each other questions.

We found that one particularly useful point in the planning stage was when we thought about describing an activity to those participating at the first event or meeting. Imagining ourselves telling them what we wanted to do helped us in formulating our aims. The meeting itself would then generate ideas and further clarify our sense of the process and content of what was to follow.

We also found that starting work on a publicity flyer to advertise the event provided the same challenge of putting ideas into a form that would invite others to share the experience. The kind of questions we would have in mind were: What is this about? Does the intention come across clearly? What might make someone respond to this flyer?

Evaluation and Celebration

A simple form of evaluation is to ask people informally what they enjoyed about participating, what could have been better and to make any other comments. Write up what is said on butcher's paper or whiteboard. This is a very clear way of acknowledging that what you have done is ending, and provides an opportunity to find out what has and hasn't worked from a range of perspectives. This information will be important in reporting on expenditure of any public grant funds (see p.49) where it may be necessary to address questions about the achievements of the project and any difficulties that have been encountered.

Where the outcome of a project is a publication or display which brings together people's work and puts it in the public eye, the celebrations surrounding the launch will mark the achievements of everyone's efforts. However, it is still worth setting the time aside in a final meeting of the committee to celebrate what you have achieved as a group.

The Possibilities of Collaboration

At the planning stage of a project it is worth looking into the possibilities of working collaboratively. On the 'Building Canberra' project we reaped the benefits of working together in an area where we shared strong interests. We could generate and sound out ideas together and rely on our respective strengths in different areas throughout the process of getting something organised. We were able to take turns in being the person active in generating stories and the one observing how things were going in the group. In scribing (see Chapter Four) we checked each other's notes, and in making books were able to make joint editorial decisions. We evaluated and celebrated achievements together. On the other hand neither of us had as much control over what was done than we would if we had been working as individuals.

Collaborations involving other art forms offer very different possibilities. Photography is an obvious medium to go with stories and writing; it can open up conceptual frameworks that go well beyond illustration. There are also musicians, singer/songwriters, theatre workers, sculptors, ceramicists and other visual artists who work in the community and who have an interest in investigating ways of bringing stories to a wider audience.

A List of Suggested Steps Through Stages of an Activity

CONSIDERATIONS

the type of activity ~ an event with broad community participation, regular planned meetings with members of a particular group, or something as simple as one-to-one or group conversations with members of your own family.

the area of exploration or theme which you plan to work with

the people you will be working with ~ the size of the group, the meeting place and how it will be set up.

the intention ~ are you most interested in stimulating stories and sharing them at the time for the enjoyment of the group, or are you wanting to record material for the group and a wider audience? What form will this recording take – a simple or more developed publication, a display, or material for radio?

the length of the project ~ a single session or a number of sessions. It is often useful to think of working your program into a series rather than simply putting on a number of events; planning, naming and continuing a series of events gives an activity identity and community profile.

the length of the sessions ~ one and a half to two hours is a good time to allow for a group of people to break the ice and get flowing. Allow time for tea afterwards; this will be the time when people will make connections on the basis of stories which have been shared in the structured situation and develop the links which will be useful in extending the process which has begun.

PREPARATIONS

work out a timeline ~ on a horizontal line mark the start and finish dates of your project. Include on the line important dates and deadlines, including all meetings, events.

think about how you will describe the activity to participants ~ in doing this you can clearly formulate what you will be doing.

prepare publicity material drawing on the above ~ flyers, media releases and entries in 'what's on' columns.

meet with people who will be involved in carrying out the activity ~ for example attend the staff meeting of the community or health centre where you will be working to explain what it is you are going to do and how you will be working, and to find out how staff can work effectively with you.

research the material which you will draw on to stimulate stories ~ this may be in the form of short passages from other community publications or other writing, readings from writers in the community, music or displays. Having material which relates directly to the audience's interests is worth its weight in gold.

put together a page describing the activity and the way you will be working ~ this helps people to make independent choices about their participation.

begin a scrapbook

CONTINUITY AND REVIEW

refer regularly to your timeline so that you are not overtaken by events

be prepared to make changes if you can see something is not working

draw attention to the scrapbook and what is coming together on its pages

take the opportunity to read individual stories back to the whole group

continue to focus on the pleasure of sharing stories

be awake to opportunities to take the activity to a second stage ~ encourage people who feel drawn to doing this

explore ways of bringing the stories to a wider audience ~ eg displays, readings on radio, publication

CONCLUSION

evaluate

celebrate

References

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Group Walks Around Narrabundah, Arts Council of the ACT, 1992

Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchison (eds), *Stories Told by Members of Narrabundah Evergreen Senior Citizens Club and Thursday Walking Group for a Day of Memories at Manuka Pool*, April 1992

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You Can't Get Rid of the Old Ones: poems from Sydney nursing homes, NSW Department of Technical and Further Education

Deborah Carey, *Lilies of the Valley*, Lilydale Day Centre, 1991

Unfolding Memories: stories from mornings at Belconnen Library with the Kirra Centre, ACT Library Service and Arts Council of the ACT, 1992

Chrissie Shaw, *The Day They Turned on the Electric Light* (registered, unpublished ms), c.1992

Other useful references and contacts

Community Writing Collection, ACT Library Service, Griffith Library, 25 Blaxland Crescent, Griffith, ACT 2604. (02) 6207 5723 for information and internet address

Community Arts Resource Collection, Victorian College of the Arts. www.vca.unimelb.edu.au. Link to Community Writing Collections through this website

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Getting stories down

Scrapbooks

Scribing

Simple Group Writing Activities

OUR APPROACH TO WRITING and story sharing encourages both writers (and people who have not previously seen themselves as writers) to participate and create material in print. We are interested in getting stories down on paper in ways that are inclusive, immediately rewarding and appropriate to group settings. This chapter details the ways in which scrapbooks have been useful to us and explores the great potential scribing offers as a way of recording stories. It also offers some examples of simple group writing activities.

Nancy Williams entering a story in the scrapbook at the Southside Community Festival

Scrapbooks

SINCE WORKING on the 'Building Canberra' project, we continue to be amazed and delighted by the simple power of scrapbooks in community writing and publishing activities. We describe here how these cheap and non-threatening books can provide a project with a visible sense of purpose and engage participants in the process of the project, as well as being great fun to work with. A scrapbook starts out as a blank book. It can include anything: stories, photos, captions, pieces of fabric, or photocopies of any printed material significant to the group.

As a scrapbook is filled with a variety of material, it speaks for itself as a visible model of the group story which is developing in its pages. As a book itself, it provides a vehicle through which participants in community writing and publishing can see their projects in the process of formation. Pragmatically speaking, it is a way of keeping material together in preliminary form and a resource when considering a wider audience for stories, whether this is by way of a reading, a radio presentation or a publication. If the project's only intention is to create a big picture in which the stories of a particular time are brought together and valued, scrapbooks make this manifest. Scrapbooks are easy to start and maintain and provide visible encouragement for people to contribute to them.

How to Begin and Keep a Scrapbook Going

For us, going off to the newsagent and buying a scrapbook has marked the start of many projects. To facilitate contributions, we have often taped string around a pen and then taped the string to the book so that anyone can write in it without having to rummage round for a pen. We start off with some examples for people to follow and identify the book by labelling it with a theme. Once the scrapbook is recognisable as a site in which stories are located, we can invite people to have a browse and add contributions. The contents grow.

A scrapbook provides a way of making a beginning without having a pre-conceived idea of what the book will include, or what shape it will take. As soon as an entry has been made in a scrapbook, there is an opportunity for response, for development, for continua ›n. Here is an example from workers at the Hospital:

We were on the lower ground floor over at
Royal Canberra
Really in the bowels of the hospital
When the sewerage tanks overfilled the backfill would
come up the toilets and down the corridor
Sandbags round the $500,000 equipment

Another story takes up this theme:

I've also got a sewerage story
Standing at the door to my office
Pushing it back
A sort of metaphor for what you do with office work
Pushing shit down the corridor to the next office.

No-one else takes up this theme, and the next entry goes in another direction:

It's changed so much over the years
When I did my training here
You'd have your Director of Nursing sitting at
the tables with you
Doctors and nurses sitting together
Now you get all these separate groups.

Hospital Scrapbook no.2

Once a scrapbook is started, it is important to remind people that it is there and can be read or added to. Many people are unfamiliar with the concept of participating in group writing and don't initially know how to relate to the developing body of work. Encouragement to use the book gradually changes this and introduces people to a collaborative process, in which some people will participate more closely than others.

Writing which we had solicited for the scrapbook in the preparation stages of the Southside Community Festival included a long piece by the professional writer, Peg Job. Here is an extract:

It took a while to discover the treasures of Narrabundah. The many nations represented at the shopping centre, the small-town mix of children, old people, and dogs, the inner-city range of languages and cultures delightfully squandered in gardens and house decoration, the warmth and kindness of a suburb which is supposed to have a high crime rate. The best friend made next door means that joys and sorrows are shared over a cup of tea as soon as they happen, that household items can be borrowed, that a cake never goes stale.

Peg Job, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.49

Those who wrote things down on the day wrote shorter pieces. By responding to each piece as it was offered and by showing an interest in details contained in it, we let people know that we valued and enjoyed what they had to add, whether this took the form of a fragment, a note, a diagram or a longer contribution.

A Scrapbook's Assets

A scrapbook demonstrates a number of things about the intention of community writing and publishing:

- it offers contributors the opportunity to be actively involved in making a book themselves;
- it brings people's stories to the attention of others;
- it includes as many voices as possible; and
- it doesn't make style or writing itself an obstacle to contributing.

Scrapbooks affirm the value of writing. As soon as a piece goes into the book, it becomes part of the group story. It is not being put on file, but becoming part of a public record that people will have access to right away. It was worth contributing! Scrapbooks also affirm the value of reading and being read. If we imagine the process ... a previous contribution gets me thinking about what I want to say. The next person who picks up the book will read me in the group story. Already my story, which previously I might have considered of little significance, has changed something. I have had an impact — my story is reaching others.

When a scrapbook has been filled and the text of all the stories is reviewed, the quality of a potential published book is already becoming apparent, and enthusiastic contributors will want to see their book in print.

Finally, because pieces rarely tend to be longer than a page, sometimes shorter, the result has a particular texture which is very readable. At the time we were working with the Narrabundah Walking Group, one of the health workers commented on how accessible this made writing both to herself and the group, whereas what she had recorded on tape with clients in the past had resulted in reams and reams of material which she'd found quite overwhelming and hadn't known how to shape.

A Place for Many Voices to Come Together

A scrapbook is an inclusive document which is shaped by what is put into it. Its physical modesty suggests that it is okay to cross out, add afterthoughts or stick in various levels of contribution — from scraps to a typed manuscript. People feel free to express a range of experience in a scrapbook:

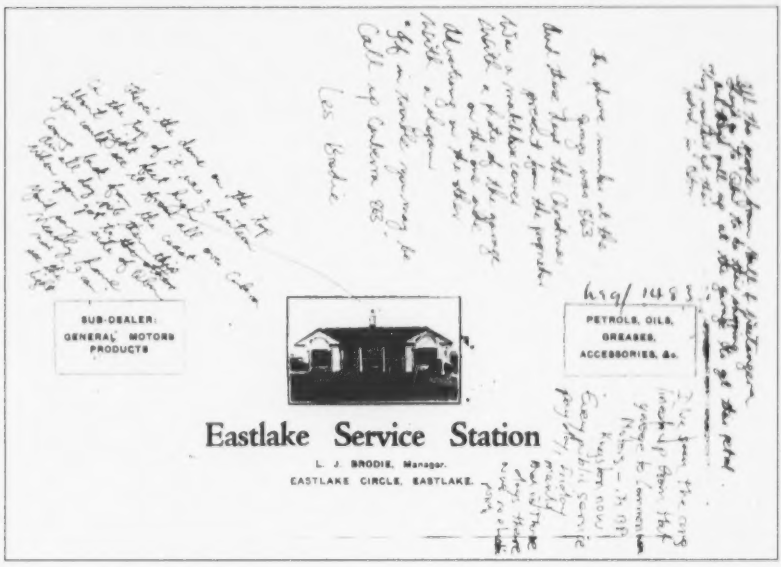
Once 'to live in Narrabundah was a social blunder'.
It reached a stage when real estate agents in advertising
differentiated between Narrabundah Heights and
Narrabundah. That's why I love the journalist Peg Job
because she just keeps on praising Narrabundah.

Nancy Zurek, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.47

Those places should never have been built
They wouldn't get away with it these days
But then you got out and realised
There was life after Narrabundah.

Travers Smith, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.47

Scrapbooks take unexpected changes of direction. Different styles of handwriting and the diversity of approaches make each one delightfully distinctive.



A page from a Southside Community Festival Scrapbook

A glance through a scrapbook shows a great variety of methods of writing things down. For example, at the Southside Community Festival, some people chose to bring a piece of writing prepared beforehand to stick into the books. Of those who wrote at the event, some casually jotted down a note or made a comment on someone else's contribution, whilst others sat to the side, seriously reflecting on what they were going to write. When people brought along photocopied photos and articles, we got them to caption them. A caption is often quite a story in itself. Some people got involved when we wrote down what they had to say. For more detail on getting something down on paper in collaboration with the teller, see the scribing section below.

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Documentation

Scrapbooks also offer themselves as ready-made and accessible documentation. As well as stories and photos relevant to the project they can contain notices of meetings, agenda notes and task lists, flyers for public events and contact addresses of contributors. In this way they can be a handy reference in the development of a project and may be used to present and promote its intention. For example, through the scrapbooks, some professionals in the area of geriatric care were able to become more familiar with the scope of what we had done at day centres, and see the value of continuing and extending these ideas.

In another way it can be a document for a group itself, as a book that reflects a group's history and highlights the stories they've shared. Here are excerpts from the Narrabundah Walking Group's scrapbook:

In October 1991, the Health and Well Being Group when notified that this group would cease stated:

1. It is important to have a supervisor to plan and organise programs that will keep us healthy.
2. It stops us depending on Government and keeps us out of institutions.
3. Since the group has been going it has been doing us a lot of good, we meet people, we do exercises to keep us agile.
4. For those of us who live alone, the social aspects, the healthy food and eating together is very important.
5. This is a carry-over for people after hospital and medical treatment.

Our Christmas party: 12 December 1991

We all brought glorious food, —
Plenty to eat, not enough people!
We did our exercises
George made us laugh
The weather was windy and raining
So we stayed indoors.

Bill the Bikie

He makes life feel worth living
Bill the bikie.
He cycles from Deakin to the clinic every Thursday —
Bill's our guide
He can do it in his sleep
He knows every turn
He doesn't even have to open his eyes
To know the turns.

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FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

My mother and grandmother both had recipe books that were more like scrapbooks – bulging with scraps of paper and cuttings from magazines and newspapers, even booklets that must have come with some appliance or other. I remember my mother's was marked with bits of cake mix and she often shook flour out of it before she put it back on the shelf.

When I started researching women's history, I found that not only diaries and letters, but also women's recipe books, birthday books and other more deliberate scrapbooks of family activities held important material on women's lives, and this appealed strongly to me. In any archival collection I look for the scraps, snippets and jottings that a busy woman might put in between the covers of a book, thinking of it as a reference, a record, a keepsake.

In my first community writing work with women, the suggestion to keep a scrapbook of writing was taken up with great enthusiasm and easily became the prototype of a publication. This scrapbook, like all the scrapbooks Annie and I have made with groups since, was always in process, bulging with items, some freshly stuck in, some waiting for a sticking day – just like my mother's recipe book. Bulging also with different handwriting, cuttings from various places, bits of things like feltex or wallpaper which have special memory-qualities, they offer in themselves a record of a group's life and activities; or at least those scraps of it which are so tantalising they demand our engagement with the story.

Scribing

MOST OF THE STORIES that weave through this book are the result of the story being written down as it was told. We use the term 'scribing' to describe this process, which includes a later stage of going over the piece with the teller to get it right in their terms. We've undertaken such scribing not for the sake of information but with a primary interest in the unique shape and feeling each story creates as it is related by a particular individual.

We began working with scribing with two main considerations in mind. Firstly, we wanted to record stories in a way which was enjoyable and stimulating for us as writers. Secondly, we wanted to draw participants into the process of composing and refining their stories as they told them, to encourage in them a sense of their own capacity as writers. As scribing was fairly new to both of us, we had the sense that we

would develop and refine our skills alongside our participants. We were delighted with the fleeting and fascinating glimpses into people's lives that resulted.

Here we outline key elements of the work of scribing: attention to detail, catching speech rhythms and particularities of speech. We draw attention to working with repetition and looking for focus points in the meaning of what is told – both useful ways of shaping the material.

Influences

We were drawn to use scribing through using it in other contexts and having seen it used successfully by others working with writing and publishing in the community. We were impressed by the quality of the material which Barbara Brookes and Colleen Burke had recorded through a scribing process in *You Live and Learn and I'm Still Learning*, a publication from a project with residents of nursing homes in Marrickville.

They had worked together, both acting as scribes, as people told their stories. Later they would bring their notes together, and they found that the short pieces which they had composed made poems of people's stories. As two writers working with people who were physically not able to write themselves, they found that this approach worked much better for them than working with a tape recorder. The process was less threatening and also less time-consuming than listening to hours of tape. It was very immediate and the person telling could have an input into how their words looked on paper. But primarily their approach appealed to us because the outcome was so satisfying.

Another inspiration to adopt scribing was the work of Sue Gardener, who gives a detailed outline of her way of working in her excellent publication on working in an adult literacy context, *Conversations with Strangers*. She puts forward an argument for working with people's own living speech, using scribing as a way of giving learners scope to develop text on their own terms, through 'a to-and-fro between meaning and the process of writing it down'. Her work also emphasises the impact on participants of the discovery that their own stories and the words they tell them in are significant.

The Work of the Scribe: Listening for Detail, Rhythms and Particularities of Speech

The beauty of scribing is that it is a making process. Inevitably the choices made by different people scribing the same story will be somewhat different. Each piece of writing will reflect individual differences in what is heard, what is considered important to the story and what is remembered in the process of getting it down. A practice session on scribing with the Canberra Stories Group revealed these differences. An early

resident of Manuka described her first house to the group. One scribe's piece emphasised the teller's memory of how small the house had been, another person's piece focused on the fact that the house had reminded the teller of a story-book house, and yet another emphasised what the teller had said about how different houses in Canberra and Sydney were at the time.

The basis of the scribing process is the ability to listen and remember. The speed at which the teller speaks is invariably much quicker than the scribe's handwriting – yet, surprisingly, by listening and taking in what is being said, it is possible to get a sense of the whole story as you are writing.

Detail is seemingly the most unmanageable area in using this low-tech approach to recording. How on earth can a writer do the same job as a tape-recorder? No-one could. Annie's journey story, which appears in the next section, shows that the scribe does not replicate the words of the teller exactly but remembers and writes what is significant to them as a listener and writer. We often have strong feelings, as we're writing away furiously, that we're losing the plot, but in fact we find we do remember important details and keep them in store until the person has finished and we can return to the places where those bits fit in. In scribing, the teller is part of the process and it is a simple matter of going back and asking questions if details have been forgotten. Detail is daunting but it tends to take care of itself.

Listening for speech rhythms is another aspect of the scribe's work. Sue Gardener describes scribing as 'developing our skill at holding spoken words exactly in our head while we write them down'. Part of this is developing a deeper listening than simply listening for detail. Each teller has quite different speech rhythms and patterns and it is these that make the story they have told unique. The following examples show how these patterns reflect ethnicity, personality, mood, sense of humour and life experience:

> *We always had small pigs*
> *And they were all growing up by me*
> *I loved doing that*
>
> Lizette, 'Earliest Memories', *Unfolding Memories*, p.16

> *Communication's the name of the game if you're a delegate*
> *And it's nice to know how the whole thing functions as a total*
> *It puts it in perspective*
> *You're not just sitting in your own little hole*
> *You're probably all got things that affect you in common.*
>
> 'You Have To Stand Up For Your Rights', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.29

What I discovered there was that the conditions weren't the best – they weren't the worst either. If you were sick you lost the time, so that's when I started in on awards, things like that, and that's when I joined the BWIU. That would've been round about '47, '48.

Fred McCauley, *The Journey*, p.7

Our house on the corner of Bougainville and
Ducane Streets
Was one of the first houses in Canberra.
It's just been pulled down.
We got the hankies out
It was really sad to see it go

Bessie Bourke, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.45

A useful way of thinking about scribing is to consider chunks of meaning rather than a mass of detail, and to get a sense of where the person pauses or takes breaths. Line breaks are ways of expressing a person's speech rhythms.

Encountering people's individual qualities of speech and getting them down on paper is one of the delights of scribing. Certain phrases will strike you; they may be old-fashioned, regional, unlikely, endearing or funny:

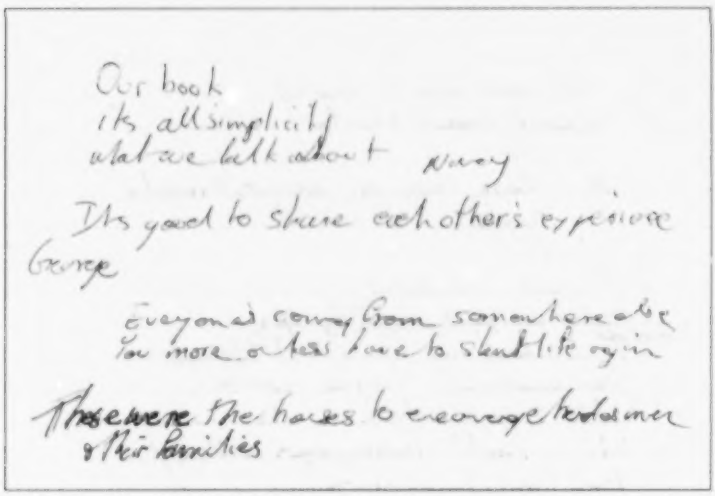
The Boot and Flogger was the lounge room of the Squats
and we stayed till stumps
The Kingston Katz, alias Roaring Wombats, played there
and we all went there with our babies, dogs – everything
No-one ever drove their cars, they were always up
on bricks.

Mikal Skeates-Udy, *Stories of the Inner South*, p.39

These hallmarks of a person's speech, which characterise an oral rendition, might not find a place in straightforward written narrative but are very much at home in a short scribed piece, and capture something which many more words could not.

The other day I was looking back – thinking where
I would have had to live in Scotland.
Right drabby it is.

George Sykes, *Annie's Walking Group Notebook*


Our book
its all simplicity
what we talk about Mary
Its good to share each other's experience
George
everyone's coming from somewhere else
You more or less have to shout like eg in
Those were the haves to encourage the dancers
& their families

A page from Mary's Walking Group Notebook

The Work of a Scribe: Shaping

During the Hospital project we spent time listening to the talk in the various work areas of the Hospital and observing the conditions of work there. The following excerpt from Annie's poem 'Food Services: On The Belt' is the result of her observations of the rhythms and repetitions of work on the conveyor belt in the Hospital kitchen at that time. As a writer she was looking for how she could translate on to the page what was for her the essence of that work environment. She worked particularly with repetition and the rolling rhythm of the belt to achieve this:

It's an apron job
It's a soft white cap job
It's a women-in-lines job
It's a uniform job
It's a low hum job
I'll have another scoop of potatoes please
It's a handful of men job
It's a lean on the line job
It's a one tired hand in your pocket job

It's a job that rolls on

It's a scooping job
It's a spooning job
It's a ladling job
It's a wiping job
It's a placing job
Another white sandwich please...

Annie Bolitho, 'Food Services: On The Belt', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p. 38

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An important part of the work of the scribe is listening to the mode of telling, to capture the rhythms and repetitions which give emphasis and particular effect to the story. Here a supervisor is describing a health-and-safety nightmare in the Hospital kitchen:

> *That's our washing machine*
> *That's the roller coaster*
> *That's our big beast*
> *We're getting rid of it*
> *It's far too high –*
> *See that woman standing on a crate...*
>
> 'In The Kitchen, Down By The Big Beast', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.14

Sometimes it is difficult to shape what you have got down, or to choose what to record. This only happens infrequently, but when it does, we have found that it is helpful to ask ourselves what the essence of the story is. In the renal unit of the Hospital we took down reams of notes but could not bring them together in a form that made sense until we realised that the story was essentially about the intense but shortlived bond that nurses have with their patients. This led us to conclude a long piece about their daily working lives working with doctors and visiting patients throughout the south-east region, as follows:

> *They say don't get attached*
> *Basically that's the thing with these patients – they're on a life support system*
> *They either get transplanted*
> *Or the system fails and they go on haemo*
> *Or they die*
> *We go to all the funerals*
> *And the families really appreciate that*
>
> 'It's Nice To Be Recognised', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.31

Scribing — the Experience as Teller

It is not often that anyone says: 'You look as if you have a story – can I write it down as you tell it to me as I think it's worth being shared with others?' This unusual offer is an invitation to the teller to pay attention as they speak to the fact that they are telling a story. There is an invitation to shape it in some way, even though at the outset the person might not know exactly what they are going to say.

When two people communicate, it is not normally consciously thought through, but when the writer has a pen in their hand writing down what is being told, the story will be more actively considered and presented. Nonetheless, the speaker is still able to talk freely without having to bring to bear

the degree of conscious (or possibly self-conscious) reflection which tends to be associated with writing.

In the following example Annie discusses her experience as teller with Mary as scribe, at a Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering when we demonstrated the scribing process. We start with the story, and follow it with Annie's experience as teller. The theme of the gathering was 'The Journey' – we were interested in people's stories of coming to Canberra.

Woden Valley Hospital – that was where I worked when
I first came to Canberra
There was that yellow-faced brick, tarmac, and those
short eucalypts that looked as if they were never
going to grow

And it was really hot those first few years I got here
It never seemed to go below thirty-six
Just such an incredible contrast from where
I'd come from

I'd left South Africa at a time when things were really
changing rapidly –
It's such a vibrant society
Nothing fits together
It's full of paradox
Such a messy place in comparison to Canberra –
I just found Canberra more intensely boring than
anything I'd ever experienced in my life
But coming from South Africa which is such an
unpredictable and violent society
I felt incredibly safe
Knowing that I probably wouldn't get burgled
And that question time was called politics.

Annie Bolitho, 'One Story Of My Early Days In Canberra', *The Journey*, p.6

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

To my surprise I found I had begun a story which was stimulated by a visit Mary and I had made to the Hospital that afternoon.

The way in which this story unfolded into my exaggerated impression of the extreme summer temperatures in the late '70s and concluded with my contradictory impressions of Canberra surprised me. Had I been reflecting on this experience with a pen in my hand, I might have tried to be more reasonable about the heat, and perhaps have been less derisory about question time.

As I talked, my talk, my contact with Mary as the listener, and the accompanying thought process, generated more thought and words. I found myself thinking something I didn't start out to say and developing a line of thought which I was only half conscious of.

On another occasion the idea of 'The Journey' might have prompted quite a different story about the early months of migration. An opinion of thongs, or the ACTION bus service might have featured. A different kind of day might have brought to mind baptism-by-fire in step-parenting. Yet as a brief re-encounter with a situation which was not forgotten but was far from mind, the hospital story of this 'journey' stands.

Scribing can set in train a similar process to writing, though it is one which many people may not associate with writing, having previously experienced writing primarily as a process of self-censorship. The story as it is written and rewritten is a collaborative process involving creative work and editing.

It is interesting that in getting the story down, Mary probably only took down half or three-quarters of what was said. Nonetheless when she read the piece back, it had a rounded feel to it. Some revisions needed to be made to the bit about the trees but after playing around with it for a bit, it worked.

The Power of Scribing

As a way of recording a story, scribing invites a sense of authorship to emerge through discussions in the shared time of reading pieces back and making changes. Thus a teller (who might previously not have seen themselves as having a voice of any importance) claims an authorial voice, in choosing to tell and in the awareness of being recorded.

In the collaborative shaping of meaning we have described above, it is possible for past experience to be renegotiated in the present in a way which is often very moving. Scribing seems to offer the possibility of actively using remembering and stories as a way of selecting certain pieces of the past from a personal sense of their significance. The possibilities which scribing offers in assisting people in the process of change stood out in our work in the Inner South, at a time of rapid change and development in the area, at Canberra Hospital, then in the throes of fast-tracked amalgamation and restructuring, and in our work with old people reflecting on their life experience. In each case participants were in need of a space in which to contrast old and new and to affirm their own place in the process of change. In this way scribing opened a way for them to venture back or forward.

In the following piece our scribed notes depict people's varying senses of what the Hospital used to be like, what it was like at the time of the project, and what it might be like in the future – grouped together under the title *That's Changes For You*.

It's changed so much over the years
Back then you'd walk in and there'd be the
smell of cigarettes
It used to be like an extended family in here
In the old days you had a matron who was in charge
and she knew the hospital inside out
We used to have social activities, like BBQ's,
staff drinks, dances
There used to be two-way roads out the front
Now the place has changed so much
There's a new building on your left
There's a cupboard where you used to have a view
There are pergola areas
Now we've gone onto Royal Canberra times
Now everybody has to apply for their jobs
Now we're expanding our numbers, now we're
cutting back
Now we're slowly meshing,
Now there's a mess
Now there's a lot more job satisfaction
Now there's a lot of people in transitory situations...

The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital, p.42

As the artsworkers presented the material which the hospital staff had contributed, the general enjoyment was obvious as people heard themselves speak about their experience as workers. A union delegate, who was understandably concerned to remain anonymous, sat back smiling as she heard herself, not immediately identifiable, but as a powerful voice amongst others.

Simple Group Writing Activities

IN ENCOURAGING WRITING IN GROUPS a great way of introducing people to the power of creating a story on paper is to use simple writing activities in which a number of people participate.

Some of the techniques we talk about here are alphabets, lists, maps and writing with a concrete focus. All have their own possibilities – a ten or twelve line piece can be put together in a short workshop or developed and added to by a number of people over a period of time.

These activities lend themselves to short time frames in which one is working with a relatively large group of people. They also have the advantage of not identifying individuals where there is a preference for anonymous contributions.

Finally group pieces offer everyone who has contributed the opportunity to have a say in how their writing will be shaped.

Alphabets, Lists and Other Ideas

The first readings on the wall of the hospital canteen introduced the idea of group alphabets. On butcher's paper in the canteen we began – A is for..., B is for..., and so on. This gradually filled up. Gradually different work areas took up this idea:

A is for administration of which there is none
B is for bullshit of which there is some
C is for crap of which there is lots
D for delegation which drives you pots
E for exasperation that drives us to drink
F is for finance who are our missing link
G for gratitude, which seems to pass us by
– also for grumbling, 'I could spit in his eye'...

'Payroll's Alphabet', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.4

Lists are another way of providing a framework for different voices and experiences. Again we found ourselves using this method in the Hospital context where we might have only one chance with an individual or group of people to get something on paper. In that environment we made various 'what's in your day?' lists which conveyed people's working lives both in terms of meaning and feeling.

morning tea break
aahh!!
run away, feet up, cup of tea, some smoke
end of break
routine starts again
patient needs
emptying bags, refilling bags
i.v.'s up, wee bags out
change dressings, do obs
do anything you haven't finished
more walking, walking, caring, caring

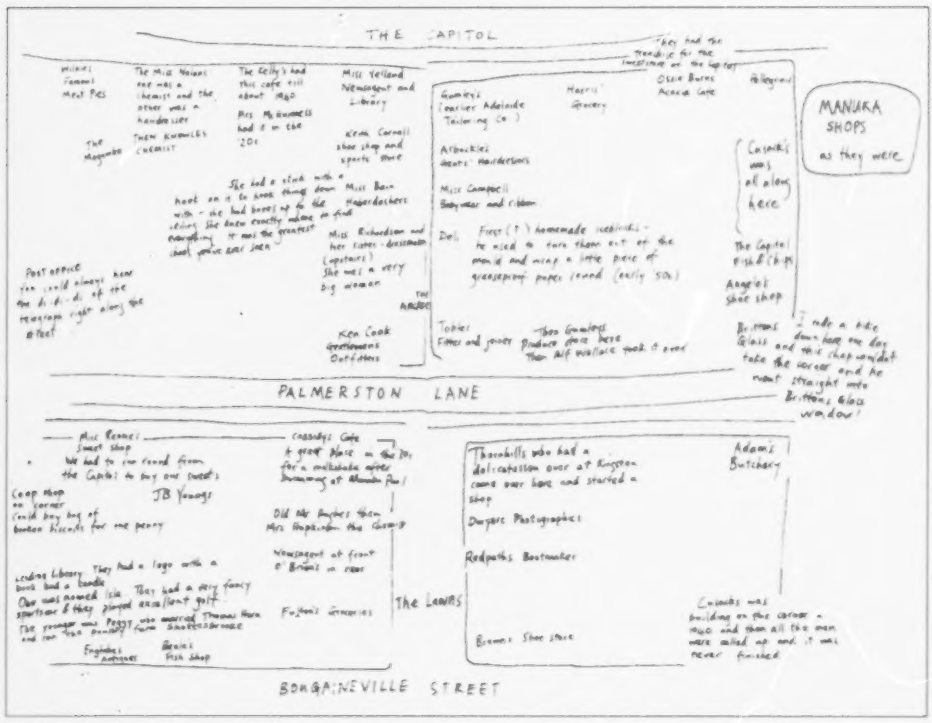
'Talking With Nurses', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.45

The list and alphabet forms lent themselves well to live presentation and enabled a number of contributors' voices to be heard in a limited time.

In a situation that is more directly about remembering you may make lists of all sorts of memories. Starting from a fairly focused position like a vivid moment, an earliest memory, and keeping to the idea of a list where each item is to the point, you may end up with something that is quite graphic and lends itself to a later poetic shaping.

Maps are another possibility for creating a written record from many perspectives. At the Southside Community Festival,

inspired by her own new understandings of the historical geography of Manuka Shops, Annie decided to sketch out a large map of this area on card. People were invited to fill in the names of shops they remembered having been there over the years, and to note down anything else that came to mind.



A map of Manuka Shops, Stories from the Inner South, *p.20–21*

One of the interesting things about this map was its chronologically mixed nature. It offered a geography of stories over time without necessarily specifying which time was which. You got a sense of the traffic of stories in this particular area, none of them privileged by their time — all relevant and meaningful to that place. Concentrating on the place of stories rather than their time can provide an historically fascinating glimpse of a locality.

Visual material and objects may also offer immediate ways of getting stories and imaginative impressions down in writing. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the invitation to caption photos on display or in scrapbooks in terms of what they bring to mind is a simple and concrete activity.

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A simple workshop which we've run also takes up a concrete focus. People are invited to bring along a special object to write about, or to choose one on the spot from handbag, pocket or briefcase. Creating a piece of group writing from each person's reflections on their object eases people's nervousness and invites laughter and connection with each other. We allow some time for individual writing as well. This workshop can give people who are a bit unsure about writing confidence to take the next step.

In group writing workshops always use butcher's paper or a whiteboard – it is vital that what is being written down is visible to everyone. This allows each person to see what has been offered and to find a place for their contribution. This is particularly important when it comes to collectively shaping the piece. At this point it is natural that everyone has different reasons for choosing a particular starting point and order which leads to energetic debate and crossings out, numbering and arrows on the text. This may look chaotic and completely confusing to an outsider, but it is an editing process over which participants feel they have a great deal of control.

> *I think it's something to do with the material you take down being at the same time about the now and the past, that makes it more alive.*
>
> Annette Fisher, *Annie's Notebook*

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Making a book

Simple Publications

Publications for General Distribution

Marketing and Distribution

IN THIS CHAPTER we talk about the making of both simple books and commercial publications. What we have to say is mainly about ways of approaching publishing as a group process, in which writers and tellers retain control of their stories and group members acquire and share publishing skills. There is detailed information about the planning and decision-making process involved in the various stages of preparing a manuscript for printing, and the marketing of the book that results. This will be of interest to anyone who is thinking of a published outcome from their work. Preparing a collectively initiated manuscript for publication is a complex process. The variety of experiences which are included in this chapter illustrate how a group of people can go about achieving this goal. Individuals looking at self publishing will also find this material relevant.

Community Publications at the Southside Community Festival 1993.
Madge Smith reading **Group Walks Around Narrabundah**

Reading their stories – Max Witterbron and Heather Hunt

Simple Publications

WHEN PEOPLE HAVE WRITTEN or contributed to a one-off event, or collected material on a theme, it is often very satisfying to make the work visible through a simple publication. A book for members of the group offers recognition, marks an achievement, provides a record and memento. Above all it puts material into a form where it can be

shared and appreciated by people beyond the group. These types of books may be simply and cheaply made, and offer practice in preparing a more sophisticated publication.

Scrapbooks and Handmade Books

The group scrapbook, which we've talked about as a method of getting stories down, is the simplest book a group can make. The value of such a simple book can be that it gives the feel of making a publication for wide circulation. At a practical level it invites discussion about title, cover design and illustration.

A 'handmade' book may be another satisfying 'one-off' form of book which rehearses aspects of commercial book publication – selection and arrangement of material and the important role of the 'look' of a book. Handmade books may be large, small or tiny. They may be made of new or recycled materials. They might sit inside boxes or fit into pouches. They may be computer printed, handwritten or composed of found text cut out of magazines and newspapers. Group members are bound to have lots of ideas and enjoy drawing on their skills and interests.

If binding pages together seems a difficult task, use a ready-made book such as an artist's sketch book and modify it. Small photo albums are very suitable for some projects. Using a range of paper colours may be a way of presenting individual stories on a similar theme. Each person writing their story in their own writing on handmade paper can be a lovely way of presenting a book of varied personal stories.

Handmade books may be exhibited. Individuals may also be inspired to make their own books.

Photocopied Booklets

Access to the Arts Council's unreliable photocopier was all that was required to make the simple booklets we put together for contributors of stories on particular occasions. The Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering that resulted in *The Journey* was an opportunity to share ideas and ways of working as well as stories – these were included as part of the record of the occasion. Here Merv Knowles suggests an idea to his peers:

> *I went to Arawang Primary School to talk to the kids. It was Heritage Week. Afterwards I got a bunch of letters, forty odd I suppose, telling me what they liked most.*
>
> Merv Knowles, 'Talking To The Kids', *The Journey*, p.9

The Journey
Stories written for, told and taken down at, 'Collecting and Recording People's Stories'
May 1992
compiled by Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchison

The front cover of The Journey

After seeing the interest people took in the story she told, Beth Knowles was inspired to write it down for the booklet:

> *The car was a Studebaker sedan, judged to be a better proposition for 'the trip to Canberra' than the open sided tourer which had served us for our trips between Clare and Nuriootpa and Adelaide in my living memory.*
>
> *My memories are of the two-toned blue duco and the dickie seats in the back, in front of the main back seat; obviously well designed and remarkably comfortable for a junior miss. The only other impressions were the glass vases attached to the sides of the car close to the back seat in clips such as one found in a train for a glass of water; which, according to family legend I insisted on keeping full of wild flowers, usually dandelions. And the blinds with pom-poms along their edges which were designed for pulling down when the hot Australian sun poured in.*
>
> Beth Knowles, 'What's She Crying For Now',
> *The Journey*, p.1

We put together *Stories Told by Members of Narrabundah Evergreen Senior Citizens Club and Thursday Walking Group for a Day of Memories at Manuka Pool* for the two groups at Narrabundah Health Centre who provided the initial stories for the scrapbooks at the Southside Community Festival. Giving a copy to everyone who had been involved affirmed the value of their stories and the pleasure people had taken in sharing

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them. Many contributors who had experience of an earlier Canberra took away their story, set amongst others from the same era, to share with their children and grandchildren.

The work of making these books was a small creative enterprise in itself, involving word-processing, choices of font and font size, photocopying, making a cover and stapling the pages together. If people had typed their own work and it photocopied clearly we left it in the original typeface. Making the cover was very enjoyable – finding a graphic, and arranging it with the title on a different quality of paper to make it stand out.

Books like these are usually made in the spirit of a gift, a way of highlighting the stories that have been shared (see Chapter Three). To make such an intention clear at the start simply involves saying that there is the possibility of taking the activity further by creating a small book for those present.

In a situation where stories have been contributed on a more individual basis, or over time, make sure that people are happy to have their stories typed and distributed to other contributors. As we've mentioned earlier, there are sometimes surprising reasons why a person would prefer to leave a story out. It is also important to check details, such as the spelling of other people's names, before going to the photocopier.

Books for a Small Circulation

When we put together material from the Kirra memories sessions and the Narrabundah Walking Group we were looking at more complex content contributed over a substantial period of time and a more sophisticated book-making process. The idea of making a book was new to participants, and at first they probably weren't sure what we were suggesting. As we have mentioned, highlighting their stories in the form of a 'snippets' page and the simple photocopied *Memories of Manuka* had an impact on people and they developed an interest in making a book.

In terms of arranging the material the themes of the Kirra memories sessions gave us a strong framework for a book. They became 'chapters'. Within each chapter we arranged the different sorts of material – short and longer scribed pieces, stories written by participants, notes taken down by Day Centre staff. As all of the themes included scribed pieces, each chapter started with those, followed by the more variable material which we grouped under a heading 'other memories'. A large illustration separated the chapters and smaller ones were used to fill in some of the white space.

When we were working on the arrangement of the Kirra book, we had a meeting with interested contributors to ask for their comments on our plans and to discuss titles. We asked them whether they would consider using as illustrations the pansy card designs which they had made as a craft activity. Mavis' comment, 'pansies are for memories aren't they?' led quite easily to the choice of title, *Unfolding Memories*.

The Walking Group's material came together very well under different walks, for example, 'A Walk In Spring' or 'A Walk In Early Winter'.

With both groups we had regular contact specifically to take down stories with a view to making a book. In the same context we read stories back to them and gained a sense of their response. During the period over which the memories sessions took place we also made special visits to the Day Centre to read back and check longer stories with the individuals concerned. This meant that checking was an ongoing process.

Final discussions about the books with the group and individual members also addressed how they would like to be acknowledged as authors. There was a strong feeling amongst participants at Kirra that surnames should not be included and, at the Walking Group, that pieces should not be individually attributed at all. Kirra participants seemed to want to recognise each other, rather than be formally recognisable to a wider readership and Walking Group members saw their book very much as the work of a group. The fact that contributors were not fully identified, that the books were for limited distribution and that the ownership of the work was seen to rest with the group as a whole, led us not to use permission forms in these cases (see below for information about getting permission to publish). However this is a matter for careful judgement. In the simple format of these publications we put all the credits and acknowledgments together on the first page of the book (see also below).

With both books we laid the material out using a computer, laser-printed it, and then took the copy to a local photocopying firm who copied, collated and bound the books. For the covers Annie prepared a simple visual and title format and we chose coloured card from their stock. This option worked well for these books, each of which was destined for a fairly immediate audience. It's important to store the originals from these productions carefully – we found that the first print run went quickly and we had to run off more copies, even some time after we completed the project.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

'Can you help me to get a grant to publish the book I've written?' 'I'd like to find out where I can get a grant to finish a book I've started writing'. 'I'd just love to settle down and write this book I've had in my head for a long time – do you know how I'd go about getting a grant?' Inevitable questions for anyone working in the role of Community Literature Officer.

Putting people in the picture. Not losing sight of their aspirations. Assisting them to think about stages, steps. To think about finding an

audience – perhaps giving a reading, connecting with community radio. Helping them get clearer on what form their project might finally take. Opening out the possibilities. Talking of different orders of books. It might be a single copy colour photocopy, a laser-printed card cover production, a calendar, an album. It might be something they publish themselves if they have the money, for example through Fast Books. They might find others working on similar issues and work as a group.

Putting these possibilities into action ourselves. Cutting and pasting, with scissors and glue and on the computer. Laying out, ordering. Making sense of how it might all fit together. Turning what was in scrap paper or scrapbook form into something permanent. Five choices in card for the cover colour from the commercial photocopying firm. We go for orange. Fifteen hundred choices in the slippery slab of colour gradations at Trish Mackintosh's. We finally settle on orange and a greyish green. There is a lot of decision-making in creating a book you will be proud to promote.

Making a book is do-able. Recently I found the comments book from the book exhibition of our own work we put on at my house in Mackennal Street that year:

'Sundials – I have several photos – and now I feel drawn to make a book.'

'A book has been opened. Thanks for the idea that I too would be able to achieve the same ends with available materials and find an emotional, spiritual and creative outlet.'

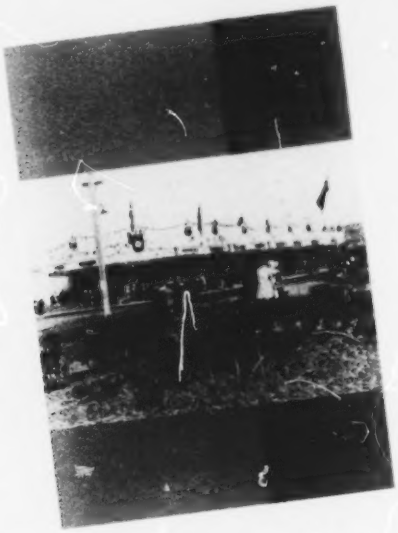
'This is a great exhibition of possibilities and I am highly motivated to go out and explore my written record.'

Making a book is a project. I've found that whether I've pictured and chosen the parameters myself, worked with others on defining them or made suggestions to someone else, being involved in making books is an active reminder of the vital relationship between words on paper and a published outcome.

Publications for General Distribution

IN MAKING BOOKS as community publishers we have found in hindsight things we've wished we'd thought about, or that we've sworn never to do again – this is part of the excitement and reward of doing one's own publication. This section is intended to assist readers to be as knowledgeable as possible before having their first go. Making a book for readership beyond the group, with the intention of selling it, will involve more detailed selection and editing as it is a presentation of the group's work, a perspective on a place or experience, rather than a simple record or reminder of stories shared. Becoming a publisher also entails some formal responsibilities. These are ethical – relating to permission to publish; practical – including layout, credits and acknowledgements; and financial – including budgeting and marketing.

In this section we look at the way we made *Stories of the Inner South* and at two examples of making a publication as a group.



The front cover of Stories of the Inner South

Steps in the Process of Making a Book

- Collect material
- Select material
- Seek permission to publish – add contributors' corrections
- Order and arrange material
- Costing and timeline – quotes from printers and other relevant professionals
- Ingredients of layout and design – meet with experts
- Copyedit material
- Layout design/typesetting
- Proofread
- Cover and other artwork – includes preparation of photos for printing
- Printing

Making Stories of the Inner South

We selected the material that was to become *Stories of the Inner South* as a three person group: Annie, Mary and Camilla (who had helped us collect stories on the day of the Festival, and was interested in learning how a book could come together). Over sixty people had contributed material, in the form of notes,

one-liners (both scribed and written), longer scribed pieces, paragraphs and quite substantial stories. Our work on developing the shape and the framework of the book involved a number of editorial decisions concerning the selection and arrangement of the material, based on our interest in keeping a strong connection with the Festival day and the inclusive feeling of the scrapbooks.

In the first place we decided to include everything we had permission for. To retain the flavour of the different voices in the scrapbooks we decided to change what was already on the page only according to contributors' wishes or where necessary to ensure readability -- and in this case the most simple changes possible. We also decided to retain the flavour of the short notes (that in the first instance seemed hard to place) by drawing them together under headings and that, for balance, we would shorten some of the longer stories. Because we had seen the pleasure of random associations the scrapbooks gave, we looked for a simple method of arrangement that would highlight the variation and also offer a framework for engaging with the book. It didn't make sense to hack and hew the material into a shape that had nothing to do with the way we had collected it, but some development had to take place.

Initial tasks included typing all the material exactly as it had been contributed onto a word processor; cutting the typescript into individual pieces so that we could sort and re-sort to achieve an order; pasting pieces together in the desired order (including cutting again and repasting); making suggested alterations on the typescript so that contributors could read their original as well as any changes.

All this involved spending considerable time on our hands and knees on Annie's lounge room floor, trying this arrangement and then that. In the end we settled for using the longer stories in roughly chronological order, interspersing them with smaller pieces collected together under thematic headings.

We found that working in a small group was successful and that it was useful to have a balance of experience. Expert editorial assistance can be particularly helpful at this stage if there is no-one in the group with experience (see Chapter Six for more about working with a writer).

Our editorial work also included decision making about the look of the text. This was essentially about key ingredients of the layout; an overall approach to headings, spacing between groups of material and the way font and typesize enhance this organisation. Within this framework there were particular issues, such as how to show the historical period each piece referred to. If we had chosen to highlight dates, we would have created the feel of a history book when we were seeking the feel of a book of stories. If we had relied on details in each piece to convey a vague sense of the time, this would have undervalued their historical significance. In the end we chose to have a simple reference to the decade at the end of each piece, for

example 'late '50s'. Something else that took time was choosing how to show the authors' names; whether names would introduce or end a piece, and what font size the names should be in relation to the piece as a whole.

Because of budget constraints we decided to work with a skilled word-processing person rather than a layout designer. We talked to her about the typeface and size, margin width, spacing and so on that we wanted and she prepared the manuscript accordingly.

In considering our budget and the time constraints in preparing *Stories of the Inner South*, we decided not to use photographs, but felt that it was important for saleability that the cover was designed and prepared for printing by a graphic artist.

Our graphic artist was interested in the sort of book we wanted to make, and we learned a lot by discussing the possibilities within our budget. After discussion she produced several 'mock-up' designs for us to choose from.

Once we were clear on the organisation of the book we felt able to write an introduction that would lead a reader into the book. We were also in a position to prepare the preliminary pages (see below).

The exact order in which to take the steps we have indicated above will vary according to the particular situation, but copyediting is usually best done when major decisions about layout have been made. This is the time for attention to detail and a clean copy of the manuscript is essential. With *Stories of the Inner South* we started this stage when our word-processor had produced an initial copy of the manuscript. We then made sure that all changes to contributions were correct – including spelling of names – and checked spelling, capitalisation and other aspects of punctuation such as apostrophes. It is very important to be consistent in matters of style as they affect the overall look and feel of your book. The *Style Manual* published by the Australian Government Publishing Service is a good resource on these matters.

When we had completed the copyediting stage we decided to ask someone else to do the proofreading, as we felt too close to the detail. The job of proofreading involves looking for spacing and typeface errors as well as stylistic consistency in punctuation, spelling, etc. Proofreading is usually done at least twice, once to pick up errors and the next to check that these have been corrected. Having a couple of people on the job can be a good idea.

In 1992 we presented *Stories of the Inner South* to the printer in the form of hard copy, but it is now usual for printers to work straight from a computer disk. Any artwork and photographs must go to the printer at the same time. If these are prepared professionally, the person doing the job will usually carry out the necessary liaison.

ELEMENTS OF A BOOK

Looking at other books gives a good idea of book format, particularly in relation to details included in the initial pages.

PRELIMINARY PAGES

Title page ~ ***title and author***

Bibliographical details ~ ***(reverse side of title page)***

- ***copyright***
- ***publisher*** ~ in community publishing your group or organisation is the publisher, and the company who prints your books is the printer
- ***ISBN*** ~ apply some time in advance for a number from the ISBN Agency (telephone 03 9245 7385 for a form)
- ***CiP data*** ~ Cataloguing in Publication data can be obtained free from the National Library of Australia in Canberra (ring 02 6262 1458 for a form). This cataloguing data will then appear on the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) database which is used extensively by libraries throughout Australia.
- ***the date and address of publisher***

Acknowledgements

Contents ~ list of chapter titles

List of illustrations

In the case of books for a small circulation the above information will be simplified, though drawing on the more formal format is useful.

INTRODUCTION

- ***may be seen as part of preliminaries or part of text***
- ***gives a feel for the book*** ~ what's in it, why – explains format, other aspects related to reading the book – directs the reader

TEXT

- ***body of book*** ~ may be arranged in chapters, sections as appropriate

END MATTER

- ***endnotes*** ~ these may be more appropriate than footnotes as they don't break up the text so much
- ***index to places and people in the text***

Elements of life
memories from the real back days

Shared in sessions of group conversation
at Kirra Centre in April and May 1994

Collected and edited by
Annie Bolitho
© The individual authors

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Board of the Australia Council of the Arts

Example of a bibliographical details page

The Work of Editing in Summary

> *They realised that it would not be possible to meet this deadline AND produce the quality product they wanted. In hindsight it could be seen that some of the problems were to do with the initial deadline, in that the editing was being rushed.*
>
> *History of Caring Words*

Arranging material for a book involves selecting and editing to achieve a whole that is consistent and readable. At the outset it is important to have in mind that the most successful community publications reflect something of the process, the group or the situation from which the book has evolved. What is it that has brought the group to the stage of wanting to put together a book and how has it happened? What is it that is particular to that group or situation? Bringing out the publication's underlying intention makes it more accessible to a wider audience and should not be overlooked. It is common practice to include this information in an introduction, but it is also an important consideration in getting an overall framework for a book which will enable the group to make detailed decisions on selection and arrangement.

Much depends on the nature of each project, but selecting and editing for a community publication will always involve consultation with those who participated.

Permission to Publish

A publisher has a legal and ethical responsibility for ensuring that contributors understand what will be published and that

they agree to this. Copyright in written material is owned by the author and, to publish that material, permission to do so must be sought.

Copyright ownership of stories told rather than written is less clear, but here there are recognised ethical considerations. Roberta Bonnin's report to the Australia Council, *Oral History and the Arts*, spells out these in relation to tape-recorded material (see References). We know of nothing that deals specifically with scribed material, but believe that the ethical practice of obtaining permission for various uses of taped material and transcripts applies to scribed stories.

On another level ensuring that contributors understand and agree to what is to be published is essential if the experience of sharing stories and writing them down is to continue to be satisfying. For contributors, considering what is involved in making a story available to a wider audience is an important stage. It is an opportunity to work further on their stories, for example to think about their choice of words, the length and the choice of language in relation to who may be reading it (see Chapter Seven for discussion about authorship).

All this really amounts to a few formal steps that in our experience highlight the value of contributions, rather than overwhelm the authors. Here we would like to note that there may be situations, such as working with the very frail aged or with people suffering from dementia, when difficulties may arise. In such cases we suggest that an approach that supports dignity and commonsense should prevail.

In general the main steps to take are to obtain written permission from contributors and acknowledge their copyright ownership at the front of the book. Printing © Individual Authors' is sufficient.

In our experience planning for the permission stage from the outset by setting up simple systems makes the job much easier. Set up a method of collecting contributors' names and addresses with their story. Use a simple permission form. *Oral History and the Arts* and other oral history publications listed in references provide useful examples which may be adapted to suit particular circumstances.

When writing to people for permission:

- enclose the contribution as it would appear
- have a tear-off permission form at the bottom of the letter
- ask the contributor to return their piece in the form they wish it to appear, with the permission form
- set a deadline for return of forms
- have a system for filing names and addresses, returned forms and so forth – it will make the task easier

Our experience with *Stories of the Inner South* was salutary in relation to permission forms. We were working under time constraints and thought that we would be saving time if we wrote to people and asked them to respond only if they had objections or alterations. People did let us know, but the process would have been clearer for everyone, and probably quicker, if we had used a form in the first place.

Design, Layout and Printing

With desktop publishing – typographical layout of the manuscript on computer – the technology of preparing a book for printing is relatively accessible and cheap. It is possible to make hands-on decisions about the manuscript right up until it is ready for the printer. Sometimes local organisations have desktop publishing resources or group members know someone else who has.

We use the term 'design' to refer to the whole look of the book, including layout and artwork. A layout designer works on the look of the book; how material is physically arranged on a page, including placement and sizing of photos, choice of typeface and other aspects of format. S/he may also set up a simple index and liaise with the printer. A graphic designer offers particular skills concerning visual aspects of the book, such as cover design and preparing cover artwork for printing. This will include liaison with the printer. Individuals usually offer various combinations of these skills. It is quite usual to be bewildered by layout and design ideas and choices, and essential to work with professionals who are sympathetic to the group's intentions.

The design framework and detailed layout within this is something that is only possible to work on once those involved know what they have to work with. Below are some pointers to things that are helpful to do prior to going to the desktop stage:

- getting an idea of the sort of publication the group is aiming for – is it big or small; glossy with lots of photos (very expensive) or modest and easily handled; familiar or unusual?
- learning about typefaces, margin widths, headers and footers is vital when it comes to decisions about typographical layout
- looking at books, especially community publications which are likely to have been done on a similar budget, is invaluable – how have they done it? What is appealing about these books? What isn't?

The cover of a book is a most important element as it is what potential readers first encounter. It needs to be immediately attractive to its audience and in keeping with the feel of the book and your group.

On seeking expert assistance – a layout expert, graphic artist, printer – always look around, gather quotes and ask for recommendations from others with experience. As with any decision involving an unfamiliar trade, try and find someone who knows the ins and outs of printing and desktop publishing. We have found that working with individuals who have a home desktop business is often more appropriate to both the working process and budget of community groups than that now provided by publishing companies who offer a desktop service.

Making a Publication as a Group

An important first step is planning and organising a structure to fit the way the group intends to create a book. At the beginning the most obvious thing in setting up a way of working is to find out when people are available and how much time they have to give to the project. It is worth breaking down what there is to do to clarify who will carry out which bits of the work.

For members of Canberra Stories Group preparing *My First Home in Canberra* for publication involved several stages over quite a long period of time. Working with material collected from a wide range of contributors, their initial task was to sift through all the scrapbooks from the Festival and stories collected at other events to select material that was appropriate to the theme. Sometimes this would mean marking an excerpt from a longer more general story. At this stage they started a list of names and addresses of contributors.

Because of the way the material had been collected it was important to arrange for it to be word-processed as soon as possible. Once typed, photocopies of individual contributions were sent to contributors for corrections and permission to publish. Lack of consistent access to resources at this point resulted in quite a large number of typing errors on this copy and although most people took this in good part, those less aware of the process of checking and rechecking that the group would go through, were rather dismayed. It is probably best when dealing with contributors beyond the immediate group to send out material that inspires confidence and interest in the finished product.

In selecting and editing material, the group worked on the principle that they wanted it to sound just as people had said it or written it at the time. On this basis they did very little detailed editing work, but did suggest minor alterations if something was really hard to understand. They also decided to include something from everyone and that, for balance, some of the longer pieces would have to be shortened.

When they wrote to people asking for permission to publish they included a copy of the relevant material showing any suggested changes, explained the need to shorten longer pieces, and asked people to let them know about any problems. Many people responded with their own alterations and suggestions by phone and letter. Group members found themselves getting to know some contributors better, and having useful discussions with them about editorial decisions.

With such a large number of contributors it was important to develop systems for retrieving names and addresses, any correspondence and original as well as edited versions of items.

As a writing rather than collecting group, the members of Caring Words discussed over many sessions what would be in their book and how it would appear. Some decisions were much harder to make than others. For instance they all agreed on the size of the book but there were quite a few different opinions about binding in relation to making it easy for people with physical disabilities to use. A more difficult issue to resolve was whether visual images of any sort should be included. The group also spent a lot of time on deciding how individuals and their writing should be introduced.

While all these decisions were made collectively, detailed editorial work on individual pieces was done on a one-to-one basis with Mary. Keris, a group member who did a lot of the initial word-processing, also contributed to the editing process by asking people questions about bits they felt stuck on. In evaluating the process after the book was published the group felt that editing was the most challenging part of it all. They commented on how important it is to understand the stages of editing and to keep copies of each draft. They also felt that time pressure during editing should definitely be avoided.

There is quite a lot of pressure in making a book for the first time, achieving things in a certain time frame and learning the steps involved in the process. During the making of *Caring Words*, members found themselves engaged in a steep learning curve. At times this was frustrating, at other times it was rewarding as they found they were able to bring the various skills and experience they already possessed to the range of processes they had to deal with. For some, writing was the focal point but others found the organising aspects just as challenging, or, like Keris, were able to contribute greatly to the editing process.

One option the group Caring Words discussed for the future was setting up subgroups to deal with writing, editing, distribution, publicity, money. These would not be mutually exclusive, but would offer the opportunity to exercise and develop particular skills.

The extent to which the relationship between the group as publisher and contributors to a book is formalised will depend to some extent on the way a group is constituted and the sort of

publication involved. Seeking written permission to publish is most appropriate in the case of a group such as Canberra Stories Group with a large number of contributors.

Perhaps if Caring Words had decided to draw up a written contract with each other it would have seemed a bit ridiculous. However, written agreements often ensure that everyone is talking about the same thing and may clarify people's roles, rights and responsibilities. If a group decides to publish books by individual members, or produce an anthology or collection that includes material from people beyond the group, making the relationship between the group as publisher and the individual author clear in writing is a useful and responsible step. Permission forms, as we have discussed above, are one way of doing this. Another is a clear statement of intention on any publicity material inviting other writers to contribute to an anthology. Our experience suggests that one of the most difficult areas to clarify is the relationship between active members and the group. Keep discussing it, and minute the discussions.

Timeline and Costing

Timelines play a particularly important role in preparation of a book for publication. See Chapter Three for general information on this and be prepared to know exactly when things have to be ready.

Keep track of the cost of the publication with a clear budget. A budget establishes how much a book will cost and for how much it should be sold to cover costs. To arrive at the unit cost, add up all the items of expenditure, and subtract any income from grants or any other source. Then divide this sum by the number of copies to be produced.

Items of expenditure include:

- printing (usually the biggest bill)
- word-processing
- layout
- artwork
- illustrations/photographs
- publicity and launch
- professional fees that pertain directly to the book production (eg editorial work)

It is essential to get quotes before deciding whose services to use, and as part of the working budget. Printers sometimes say that they want to see the material before they quote, but a printer can usually give a reasonable estimate on the following information: the size of the book, the number of faces (each side of a page is called a face), the paper stock, the number of

colours on the cover, the cover stock, and the number of photographs that are being used. Word-processing may cost by the page, as may typographical layout. The increasing accessibility of desktop technology keeps these rates competitive.

In our experience, groups and organisations rarely have all the funds to publish a book at the beginning. A clear budget offers a realistic picture and basis for planning cost cutting. As we suggest below groups and organisations often have all sorts of resources which help cut costs — word-processing, layout and even graphic design skills may be at hand. Printing is usually the least accessible resource and the bill may need to be paid immediately.

Caring Words provides an example of determination and intelligent stretching of a shoestring budget. The Carers' Association provided the group with $250.00 towards the cover of the book. Rotary gave the members $600.00 on a long-term loan. The Community Literature Program covered postage, photocopying and other expenses for publicity and the launch. They shopped around until they found a printer who not only gave a better price than anyone else but was prepared to wait a month for the bill to be paid. They set their general price at $10.00 per book, to cover costs and provide a margin of profit, and a couple of months after publication they had not only paid the printer's bill but returned Rotary's loan.

Marketing and Distribution

THE MAIN INTENTION of publishing a book is to reach a wider audience. Planning who to reach and how is a challenging and rewarding part of the process which may provide future projects with a head start financially. There is a high chance of success as there is often a first clear market: contributors and their contacts, groups and organisations with an interest in the particular content and neighbourhood. Make sure to access this audience well, and look beyond it to the book's likely broader audience. It may be useful to set up a sub-committee of the group or to rotate tasks associated with marketing and distribution and ongoing sales work.

One of the initial tasks in marketing and distribution is to develop publicity. We think of flyers as the multi-purpose marketing tool. Send flyers to all the individuals, organisations, places that may be interested. Get them up on notice boards. Deliver them personally to community venues and find out where to leave them. Keep a list of where flyers have been sent/taken, for follow-up and later use.

FLYERS – THE MULTI-PURPOSE MARKETING TOOL

- for direct mail-out to contributors, relevant organisations and individuals to let them know the book is ready
- as a press release
- as leaflets to take to places or events where people may be interested
- to send out in response to enquiries
- to slip into every book you sell
- to adapt into a launch invitation

FLYERS – ESSENTIAL DETAILS

- title, collective authors, publisher, price and where to get it from
- a couple of short, informative paragraphs about the book and its authors
- provide a tear-off mail order form (don't forget to have the mailing address on it, and to add postage and handling costs)

Example of a Canberra Stories Group flyer and order form

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Moving Books out of Boxes

A special price is a useful marketing strategy. With publications which feature contributions from a number of people establish a special price for contributors. In the case of *Stories of the Inner South*, we knew that the sixty contributors would be our first readership, that they would probably buy some for relatives and friends and also be good sales people for the book. The flyers indicated a special contributor's price and we encouraged early ordering. (Where books are the work of a small group, each author should have a free copy.)

'Pre-publication' ordering is a way of getting in money for the printer's bill. In the case of *Caring Words*, the group established a special 'pre-publication' price for people who ordered the book before a certain date.

The launch of a community publication is a vital part of marketing and distribution, as well as being an opportunity to celebrate and thank everyone involved. Canvass the people who have been involved in the publication for ideas for the invitation list. Invite media people – make particular contact with them first. Consider everyone on this list to be someone who is going to buy the book and plan the launch accordingly.

Think carefully about where the launch will be, and when, and also who will launch it – this is an important occasion for highlighting all the stories that have been shared as well as an opportunity for publicity and sales. Food and drink is an essential element of celebration and hospitality.

To create an event that goes off well for everyone it is important to have a fair degree of control of the situation. Some of the best community publication launches we've been to have featured readings by the writers and been planned and rehearsed so that everyone is confident of what will happen when. Other general lessons: brief the person who is doing the launch and appoint someone to do the catering at a reasonable price. In the words of the review of the making of *Caring Words*: 'The lesson here is to meet with the person who is to launch the book before the launch'.

We launched *Stories of the Inner South* at the same Festival where we had collected the material twelve months before, as it was familiar, celebratory and would involve the sort of people who might buy the book. The organiser of the Festival helped us arrange for afternoon tea to be provided by the Scouts, and as it was a local book we invited a local Member of Parliament, well known for his support of community activities, to launch it.

The Festival launching had much going for it, and we sold lots of copies of the book, but thinking about it afterwards we felt there were disadvantages to the public and outdoor nature of the setting. For a start it drizzled with rain, and while it was very jolly with a large number of people squeezed into the *Stories* tent for Devonshire tea as well as book sales, it was a bit

chaotic. The actual launch took place away from the tent at the microphone provided for general Festival activities and so had an unfocused quality to it, rather than the intimacy which would have highlighted the stories that had been brought together.

Thinking Beyond a First Market

Reviews are a time-honoured way of getting publicity for books. Think imaginatively about this. If it's not the literary pages of the newspaper that will reach the best audience for the book, what is it? Association newsletters, professional journals, local magazines and feature pages of local papers may be better contacts. Send potential reviewers a complimentary copy before the launch, and don't forget to invite them.

Seek out a radio interview — find which station and program are appropriate. Find out who the producer of the program is and approach them rather than the presenter.

Is there an educational or research audience for this book? Caring Words' members mailed flyers to tertiary health education departments around Australia and sold twenty books by mail order as a result.

A number of accessible and relevant sales outlets are important in making a community publication available. For *Stories of the Inner South*, Kingston Library (a landmark for Inner South residents) was a major sales depot. With wonderful goodwill the librarians wrote receipts and kept track of the takings which we collected from them on a regular basis. The owners of the Sports and Barber's shop at Manuka, who had contributed to the book, and the community-spirited proprietor of the Manuka Photographic Store were also important sales outlets for us.

Local newsagents seemed an obvious place but we found the books got lost amongst the plethora of sales items. This may not always be the case. As always with a community publication, making personal contact with sales outlets that show interest seems to be the key.

Sales outlets usually want to make some profit from selling a book (unless they are a non-profit agency or organisation or public service). Offering them the contributor's or other special sales price may satisfy this need, but be prepared for the standard booksellers arrangement of buying a small number of books from you on the basis of a 40% discount from the retail price.

Thinking specifically in terms of the book and its community makes it possible to discover further sales opportunities. There are many events where it might be possible to sell books or take flyers, such as meetings, workshops, in-services, training sessions, conferences and public talks. An occasional but regular market stall (possibly with another group working on distributing their book) keeps

group and book in the public eye as well as making a few sales. A stall at a local shopping centre on Saturday mornings may be good for selling a book which features the locality.

Working with other groups to develop an approach to publicising and marketing community publications can be very worthwhile. One of the advantages for the Victorian community writing groups who are members of the Victorian Federation of Community Writers is the possibility of a co-ordinated approach to distributing and marketing the books their members produce.

As this chapter shows, making a publication for general distribution is quite a long and detailed process. We find that some points in the process really test our patience, but we've never said it wasn't worth it, and we're always ready to do another.

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Moving on

Forming a Community Writing and Publishing Group

Working With a Professional Writer

Costs and Funding

ENTHUSIASTIC INVOLVEMENT in an initial activity can often lead to continuation of the project in some form. We came to such 'moving on' points several times in the 'Building Canberra' project and here we draw on these examples and the experiences of those involved. We offer suggestions which will be useful to individuals with similar interests wanting to work together, or people already in a group but wanting to develop a more ambitious project. Setting up a writing and publishing group, employing a professional writer and seeking funding for a specific project are all practical ways of approaching long-term community writing and publishing activities.

First meeting of the Canberra Stories Group

Forming a Community Writing and Publishing Group

CANBERRA STORIES GROUP AND CARING WORDS are groups with quite different experiences of working as a community writing and publishing group. Their experiences form the basis of this section.

There are a number of things to consider when forming a community writing and publishing group and they are as much to do with working as a group, as they are with the actual activities of writing and publishing. Here we cover the basis for forming a group, the issue of focus, suggestions for structure and what is involved in making a publication as a group.

Getting Together

The enthusiastic gathering of people at the Collecting and Recording People's Stories sessions opened up the possibility of continuing the activity through an ongoing group. The publication, *Stories of the Inner South*, to which a number of the participants had contributed and which had generated a lot of interest in further publication of Canberra stories, provided an immediate model for such a group to follow.

When we knew that some people were particularly interested in continuing involvement and further publication, we encouraged them to come along to a meeting to establish a new group.

Finding a Focus

People are often full of enthusiasm in the first stages of forming a group, but unsure of what to do. In fact it doesn't really matter all that much what the first thing you decide to do is — the important thing is to do it, so that wonderful initial energy for 'doing' is not wasted with the result that people lose momentum and disappear.

A vital part of taking the initiative in forming a group is offering the possibility of involvement in activities that meet the new group's enthusiasm. Canberra Stories Group started out with an interest in making a publication, quickly took up Carol Mackay's idea of the theme 'My First Home in Canberra' and began preparing to work as a group in a community setting at the 1993 Southside Community Festival. The time frame from the first meeting of the group to the Festival was about three months, with Christmas in between, so it was about the right pace for enthusiasm and realistic achievement.

Over several meetings the group prepared photographs and text for the outdoor display at the Festival. The previous year a number of them had had stories scribed into scrapbooks by one of us. Now they practised scribing so they could take down stories. People discussed tasks such as selling *Stories of the Inner South*, which was being launched at the Festival, and talked through ways of encouraging people to contribute to the next publication.

Structuring Groups

A community writing and publishing group may operate quite satisfactorily within a rather loose structure as people sort out interests and the time they have available. When members take up a project, structure may become more of an issue and there will be the need for formalities when money is involved – eg making applications (see discussion of costs and funding below), signing cheques. Groups vary enormously in particular detail. The crucial thing is to find the shape that meets the interests, time constraints and needs of your particular collection of people.

Canberra Stories Group

In the three months of meetings before taking up their first formal activity, Canberra Stories Group appeared to be a fluctuating group of between five and fifteen, with some people coming regularly to meetings and others more interested in being kept in touch with events and activities. After the Festival, when there were scrapbooks full of stories about 'My First Home', the group became a small core of people who were interested in working on the book, and could make the time to do it.

While this group worked intensely for many months and seemed in some ways to *be* Canberra Stories Group, there was still the sense of a wider, loose group; people who were part of the initial story-sharing and publication activity that produced the group, people who subsequently contributed to *My First Home in Canberra*, others who heard about the group through its activities. We anticipated that other small groups might emerge from this broad base, to carry out particular projects

using the framework of collecting, publishing and distributing that the first core group had established. In fact, with the experience of *My First Home* behind them the original group went on to pursue further projects, connecting with various wider communities and bringing other people into the network.

Strong connections have been made with local government heritage organisations and small amounts of funding have been successfully sought from local heritage and arts funding bodies. Grants and profits from book sales have provided a basis for publishing about one title a year. Each new project brings with it new ideas and learning experiences. This growing professionalism means that the community anticipates excellence in the work that Canberra Stories Group produces.

The structure of the group to date remains relatively informal — the teapot logo expresses this — but minutes of meetings are now kept and members have learned to keep track of income and expenditure through a simple accounting system.

> *Canberra Stories Group is one example of a small group of enthusiastic amateurs which was formed with the encouragement of Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchison and in response to the community interest shown in* Stories of the Inner South.
>
> *The Group consists of five women of varying ages who have a common interest in recording and collecting stories of early residents in the Canberra area. None of us are 'writers' in the accepted sense but we are fortunate in being able to call on Mary Hutchison for her professional advice and editing skills. To date the Group has published three books:* My First Home in Canberra; Past Images, Present Voices; *and* Tracks Through Time, Merv Edlington's Tuggeranong, *with encouraging response and demand from the public. The Group feels it is fulfilling an important need in the community. People enjoy reading of times past and this is borne out by the number of books sold and the continuing demand.*
>
> *After having helped with* Stories of the Inner South *we realised that photographs were necessary in our 'story books'. One of our group with camera skills then took suitable photographs for both* My First Home in Canberra *and* Tracks Through Time. *We were fortunate to have access to private photographs for* Past Images, Present Voices.
>
> *The Group has learned the hard way — by doing and experiencing. We have all happily taped interviews with our story-tellers, usually over a cup of tea, and then*

laboriously transcribed them. Our meetings, where plans and decisions are made, are at a kitchen table in the home of one of the group – again over a cup of tea. When it came to deciding on a design for our logo, the teapot HAD to feature. It perches on a pile of books and has become a well-known trademark of Canberra Stories Group.

We're well respected in the community despite the fact that we're an informal group without elected office bearers. We've been invited guest speakers at local Rotary, Probus and University clubs and are happy to familiarise our listeners with our aims and ambitions. And we are even called on for advice by groups wanting to put their own books together.

Our successes and the skills we have developed have given us the confidence to begin work on yet another two books.

Meryl Hunter

Launch of **Tracks Through Time**, *Canberra Stories Group, 1997*

Caring Words Group

When Caring Words first came together they had not met each other before and weren't sure how they might work as a group. Their commitment to saying something to others about their experience and their enthusiasm about writing enabled them to begin the process.

Over a couple of months people at the first meetings made decisions about making a group book.

They decided to produce a collection of writing made up of contributions from each group member, but then had to decide whether they were an open or closed group. They found it was hard to integrate people who joined later in the process, when it was already in train, and hard for the newcomers to feel part of the group. It was decided that the group would have to complete the publication before expanding, and that even then, as the group had become quite close-knit, the issue of new membership would have to be thoroughly discussed.

Caring Words members discussed various alternatives for the future, but in the end finished their formal association with the publication and final sales of their book. It is important to recognise that despite clear potential for all sorts of ventures, participants in a group activity may simply have done what they set out to do through one major project. However people are very likely to use the skills they have gained through their experience of community writing and publishing activities in some other setting.

Working with a Professional Writer

A PROFESSIONAL WRITER, who has experience and/or an interest in working with groups, offers a developing project a love of language as well as highly developed skills and experience in working with words. A writer can bring inspiration and patience to the process of making language 'speak' and have an eye for what a group of different individuals with similar intentions can achieve.

In preparing to work with a writer a group needs to clarify its intentions. Are the skills of a professional writer needed at this stage, or some other kind of input? Here the amount of money the group has in the kitty may be the deciding factor. Besides choosing the right person and looking for funds the group must clarify exactly what it wants the writer to do and set up a structure for the writer's work. For writers there are many challenges and rewards in working with community groups. We include some thoughts on this from our experience.

Planning to Work with a Writer

The bottom line in deciding what a writer may bring to a group is what a professional offers that is distinct from members' skills but appropriate to their interests. Writers may offer particular skills in making a play or a book, running writing workshops or collecting stories.

Preliminary planning is important before meeting writers to discuss working with them. It will be useful to clarify the aim of the project, the reasons for doing it and ways in which it may most appropriately take place in your situation. The next step is to develop the program in consultation with the writer. In

making plans consider the resources available. From our experience of working as writers with various organisations, time is often a critical issue. Bringing in a writer does not save time. It enables something new to happen.

Matters such as fees, hours of work, material and space requirements should all be discussed and understood before employment commences. A written contract is a useful way of mutually clarifying these details.

Ongoing support through the process is vital to the successful development of a project with a writer. Setting up a subgroup or committee to do the initial planning and act as a responsible reference group through the project is an effective time-management strategy. It also means that not just one person is carrying the dream and work of the project and that during the writer's involvement s/he has a support group as well as a clear idea of who is taking responsibility for what. It is worth having someone on your subcommittee who is not part of your organisation, but has some interest in the project. Ideally this would be a Community Arts Officer or literature program co-ordinator who has given advice about the project from the start. It is also important to have at least one of the participants in the project on the subcommittee (see Chapter Three for further discussion of project committees).

Often even with careful initial planning there needs to be some adjustment to process and goals once the project gets under way. So think of planning in terms of guidelines which allow for some testing and change. Regular meetings between the subcommittee and the writer provide the mechanism for this (see Chapter Three for steps through stages of an activity).

Sometimes, despite all the planning and preliminary discussions with a chosen writer, projects are not funded and do not go ahead. Most writers will put in preliminary time and effort on this understanding; however, the contribution the writer has made is their work and if you take up and pursue these ideas in any other way, it is respectful to inform the writer and formally acknowledge the input made.

What a Professional Writer Can Do For You

One issue to keep in mind in identifying what you need from a professional writer who has community writing and publishing skills, is how best to use the resources available.

You may decide that it would be useful for a writer to come in to get you started – to generate enthusiasm and provide stimulation for work which you could then continue by yourselves. This may be a matter of a fee for a couple of two-hour sessions, or in an inexperienced group it may be the main reason for seeking funding.

Editing is an area which can present problems to participants in a 'do-it-yourself' process. It requires sensitivity, a view of the overall product, and confident writing skills. This

may be a point at which a professional writer can be very helpful, but also the hardest stage for an outsider to come in on. If a writer is to work as editor it may be best for them to have some involvement in the project from the very beginning.

Another critical point at which expertise helps may be when you prepare material for publication and go through the process of getting it off to the printers for the first time.

We found with Canberra Stories Group that having someone guiding the group into each stage of the process is helpful. It pre-empts time consuming mistakes, and sets up a clear model to follow in the future (with improvements of course). In this case a writer would provide a framework with useful approaches at each stage; from stimulation to preparing material for publication. In this role the writer is an 'outside eye', while participants carry out the detailed work of the process.

On the other hand you may feel quite confident of what is involved in the different stages of the process, and feel that when it comes to professional assistance, your priority is developing your writing. In this case a series of writing workshops relating to your interests might be most appropriate.

Finding a Professional Writer

Some professional writers have a lot of experience in working with writing and publishing in community contexts. This may not be absolutely necessary to a project, but it is important that whoever you choose to work with has an interest in this way of working and enjoys working with other people. It is also an advantage if they are broadly familiar with your context and have some enthusiasm for working with you.

It is valuable to get to know one or more writers who might be interested in working with you before you decide who to employ, to find out how they would each tackle your project and what specific skills they offer.

It is also useful to find a writer before you make your funding application so that you can develop a proposal which is consistent with factors like the writer's availability and method of working. (Some arts funding bodies require the name of the writer and supporting material such as CV and samples of work with the funding application.)

Program organisers and organisations which may be useful in helping you find a writer include Writers' Centres, Community Arts Officers, Regional Arts Development Officers, Multicultural Arts Officers, Union Arts Officers, and regional arts councils. These are funded by the Australia Council and state arts ministries and are often involved in developing and supporting applications for groups to work with professional writers – they may be able to give you advice on your application and appropriate sources of funding. State and

territory Community Arts Networks (CANs) are another useful contact and sometimes have registers of writers and their community interests. Finally, if you are seeking financial assistance for a writer through the Australia Council for the Arts or your local arts funding body, these organisations may be able to provide you with names of writers who are experienced and interested in taking up community projects.

What Community Projects May Offer a Professional Writer

The writing activities we describe in *Out of the Ordinary* take place on a very different basis from talks and tours by professional writers. They also offer professional writers unusual opportunities, including long-term engagement with the stories people make of their lives.

FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

When I take up a community writing project I'm always put on my mettle. Such projects demand energy, enthusiasm and endless inventiveness. I think that's one of the things I like best, inventing the framework and the detail within it that will meet the interests and capacities of an enormous range of people in situations both familiar and unfamiliar to me. What is the structure that will be most productive here? What models and activities will strike a chord with these participants? What outcomes will be most achievable and satisfying to everyone concerned?

Designing an appropriate project is for me a strongly creative endeavour. I develop it through images as well as intentions, looking to make it artistically as well as practically coherent. In this I think I particularly draw on my experience as a theatre writer. Designing a project for me is like shaping a play; knowing my characters and their desires, drawing them together, staging meetings and interactions, working towards a strong focus for the intentions of the project. I often find myself developing visual and performance-based outcomes, and my analogy for a community anthology is a play.

Community projects have also opened up new avenues for my own writing practice, enabling me for instance to work with visual forms of text and to work with artists in other media. Through community projects I've developed new awarenesses of story and voice, of what different forms of writing offer – and deny. Community projects have particularly honed my structuring and editing skills.

Although while I'm inside a project I may not know quite what it offers my writing and thinking, most projects I've worked on have provided me with the opportunity to practise writing in some form, as well as giving me material to draw on in future work. Some things, like the tip diaries I kept during the Revolve project when I first met Annie, I've drawn on over and over again.

The skills I bring to community projects are writers' skills: the capacity to put myself in someone else's position, to listen, to handle stories with care, to draw meaning and shape from raw material. I know also that as a writer I am curious about other people, their life stories and journeys, and the way they connect and interact with each other. My work is stimulated by people contact and talk.

There are times when I've really had enough of the intensity of engaging with others that community projects require, and I no longer want to leap from one short-term project to the next, in a place far from home. But community projects satisfy so many of my writing interests, not least that of continuing to invent ways of working with writing in community settings.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

Being a writer is a deeply engaging part of my life. I go into a writing project aware that in the time ahead others will find something of this in their lives. For many it may only be a satisfying passing experience, but there will always be some who take to writing as a medium of expression. Those who have explored writing already are likely to take new steps – often standing by their work in public for the first time. In some ways starting a project is like opening up a small journal for a time – I create a 'writing space' so that everyone's work has a place to go and find a response. This in itself gives me enormous satisfaction.

At the start everything about me hums as I become absorbed in following the storyline in a particular community setting as it begins to emerge. It is an exciting moment when I have done enough of that to visualise how the project will look and communicate this to others. Once or twice I have found an unexpected interpreter amongst the participants early on in the project. Someone who has found out about it and sees the point of it all completely. Watching a stranger speak to their peers in their language about what a project could mean and the commitment that this generates is a fascinating step in the process of the imagined framework taking on its own life.

Once in the swing, activity and written material tend to proliferate. Time is usually short. But here and there, apart from taking notes and scribing, I write a piece in response to something I have encountered during a project. Where a piece captures some essence of that community I feel a real gratification that I have both been able to encourage those closer to the scene to write about it, and have been able to witness in words what I have been privileged to be part of. Images, ideas and questions which most intensely engage me whilst I am working on a project tend to be lasting ones and sometimes come into my own work later on.

By the end of a project I am often worn out. It is always poignant that the culminating events at which everyone gets together to see what has been created during a project are one-offs. The energy that flows from the work, the pride, the sense of an expanding network and the involvement of the broader community makes a mockery of contemporary consumer oriented values. As a window into another way of being it seems to deserve more than a few hours. Nonetheless the fact that these occasions show writing at work in a way that many people have never seen before is one of the very satisfying aspects of my work.

Working as a writer in community has opened up opportunities I don't know that I'd have found anywhere else. In those projects which have culminated in presentations I have learned a lot by being involved in pulling together a show that includes material I have written. Putting on displays and gatherings has also involved a high degree of cooperation and choreography amongst a large number of people and a strong sense of how a wide range of material will best work for an audience.

I've learned from being part of collaborations involving other art forms. I've been through the pleasure and frustration of getting clear with others what we are making together. This means being able to give my fellow artists a sense of what writing will contribute to the whole and being open to possibilities I'm not familiar with. This can involve a fair degree of tension. But things do gradually resolve. What others create in the same situation as myself expands my vision. They are skilled in completely different arenas. Much becomes possible.

Costs and Funding

WHEN APPLYING FOR FUNDING it is important to develop a clear picture of the costs involved and prepare a budget. Most funding bodies require a reasonably detailed breakdown of expenditure and provide forms based on particular budgetary categories. Although this looks demanding and time-consuming at first, filling out a funding application can be a very useful way of clarifying your thinking and setting up a workable budget. In the following we discuss funding sources, key costs, and matters to consider in receiving and administering funds. It is a preparatory look at what may be involved in taking up the funding option when moving on from an initial activity. It is not a guide to making funding applications or dealing with public funds.

Arts Funding Bodies

The federal arts funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, provides funds for community arts activities. Funds for community writing and publishing activities are available through the Community Cultural Development Fund and the Literature Fund.

The Literature Fund offers funds for a professional writer to work in community settings, often as a 'writer-in-residence'. The Community Cultural Development Fund provides funds for a broader range of activities and assesses applications on the basis of their cultural benefit to the community involved.

Details about the sorts of activities that may attract funds and general information for applicants are provided in the Australia Council *Grants Handbook* (available from the Australia Council free of charge). Funding programs may change from year to year so it is important to consult the *Handbook* as part of your planning process.

The community involved will often make the application, either themselves or through an auspicing body for the project. Individual artists can also apply for community cultural development funding, as long as the project meets the relevant criteria of the particular program to which they are applying. In any community project the Australia Council looks favourably on a financial commitment from the community group involved, which may take the form of 'in-kind' support, such as office space, printing, phone usage or access to word processing.

State and territory governments also support arts funding programs which include community projects. In most states Writers' Centres play a role in supporting community writing, directly administering funding from the state government to carry out particular community projects. Part of this role is to actively encourage writing in regional and rural areas. It is worth contacting your nearest Writers' Centre to express an interest in the kind of community writing project you would be most interested in seeing developed in your area.

Beyond this, state programs vary and it is best to get in touch with your state government department for the arts for their guidelines. State and territory arts funding programs use a similar method of assessment to the Australia Council. Advisory boards or committees of practising artists and others involved in the field make the funding decisions.

Application forms and guidelines to programs are available from each of the Australia Council Funds and from state and territory government departments. Applications for project funds are usually called for twice a year on set dates. It takes at least six weeks to get a good application ready. The officers administering the funding program to which you are applying are available to answer general queries and give feedback on whether or not a project falls within their guidelines. Writers' Centre Co-ordinators, Community Arts Officers, and Union Arts Officers are also available, in regional placements, as 'in the field' support when making applications.

Publication Costs

Some funding bodies are reluctant to contribute directly to publication costs – ie word processing, design and printing. They may prefer to contribute to the salary of a professional writer and to the process of writing and developing content. Funding guidelines and discussion with project officers will indicate to what extent you may claim these costs, and on what terms.

On the other hand, if a publication will be sold, the group may be in a position to recover some costs and even make a small profit, so publication costs may be offset against this income. If this approach is taken the publication must be thought about in relation to possible sales and the group's capacity for pursuing a marketing and distribution plan over some time. If this approach is to be combined with an application for funding for other project costs, the budget must be framed so that either the group or some other funding source provides the 'up-front' funds for publication costs. This is because government funding bodies do not see their funds as contributing to profit, and recovery of costs will be counted as income.

Arts funding is not the only source of financial support for community writing and publishing activities. As in all cases of seeking money, explore as many avenues as possible.

For some of us finding money, whether from the public or private sector, seems a daunting task, but there may well be more than one person in the group who enjoys doing it and is extremely good at it. Also, as mentioned above, explore your own resources and contacts. It's amazing what asking around a group can produce in terms of in-kind support, discounts and simple generosity.

WAYS SOME OF THE GROUPS IN THIS BOOK HAVE MANAGED TO FIND MONEY

- Think about the organisations which may be interested in what the group plans to do. For instance the Carers Association of the ACT provided Caring Words with enough money to pay for the cover of the book, and were happy to be on the other end of the phone for suggestions, publicity and general support.
- Service organisations such as Rotary and Lions Clubs are often prepared to contribute small sums. Caring Words received a loan of $600 from Rotary, which they were able to pay back after initial sales. The Rotary Club involved was delighted and indicated their interest in further support of that nature.
- Explore sponsorship from the business sector. Local traders may be happy to support local publications in various ways – from small sums to providing an outlet. Mick and Mattie O'Brien at the Manuka Sports and Barber's Shop did a tremendous job of selling *Stories of the Inner South* to their long-standing clientele. Larger business concerns may also be interested in providing support in return for being mentioned in association with the project.
- Local government programs may be interested in contributing to the project in some way. For instance, the enthusiastic response by health workers to our work with Kirra gave us a

strong basis for approaching ACT Health for support for further work with the department's day centres for older people.

- A number of community cultural development activities are relevant to 'heritage' as well as the arts. This was certainly the case with our 'Building Canberra' project. More recently Canberra Stories Group has been able to attract funds from the ACT Heritage Council Grants Program. This avenue of funds may be worth exploring.
- Unions are often interested in community arts projects – whether in developing their own 'Art in Working Life' activities, or in providing small sums to support something which they see may benefit members, or encourage others to join. The Hospital choir at Canberra Hospital continues to have a strong relationship with the Art in Working Life Committee and mounted 'The Phantom of the Hospital' with the Committee's support.

Receiving and Administering Funds

Funding bodies often require funds to be received and administered by an incorporated organisation. It is usually possible to find an umbrella or auspicing organisation who will receive the funds and take responsibility for its administration so that incorporation and its attendant formalities are not required. An auspicing organisation can also operate a bit like a bank for the group – holding money received whether through funding or sale of books – and providing mechanisms for its use and withdrawal. Sometimes the umbrella can include access to mail and telephone systems, with costs deducted from the group's account.

It is also possible for a community group to open its own bank account without being incorporated – an option which the group, Caring Words, took up when they received a loan from the Rotary Club, which had to be paid into a bank account.

FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

At a Canberra Stories Group meeting in October 1997 when the publication of Out of the Ordinary *is an item on the agenda I see how thoroughly itself this group now is. This perception is more to do with me and my initial role in the group, than the group's development. It seems it's taken four or five years for me to separate the work Annie and I did with* Stories of the Inner South *and the Collecting and Recording gatherings, from my ongoing involvement with Canberra Stories Group.*

Over the years I've come to meetings with lists and agendas, information about funding applications and acquittals, handy ways of keeping accounts, and some sense of responsibility. I'm sure that contribution has been important, but now it's different.

Meryl reads the minutes from the last meeting. Questions are asked about various items. Carol's brought the albums she's put together of photos from CSG launches and occasions. We discuss the Out of the Ordinary *timeline and responsibilities. Suggestions are made about the piece Meryl is writing for it about the group. General warmth and support are extended to the enterprise. Then there's intensive discussion about interviews for the next book which everyone is contributing to and Val brings us tea and pavlova. It's about 9.30pm when I leave and they're still deep in talk about Canberra people, places and books.*

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The Literature Fund, Community Cultural Development Fund and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Fund are part of the Australia Council and may be contacted through it

Australia Council for the Arts, PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012.

Tel (02) 9950 9000, toll free 1800 226 912. http://www.ozco.gov.au

Reflections

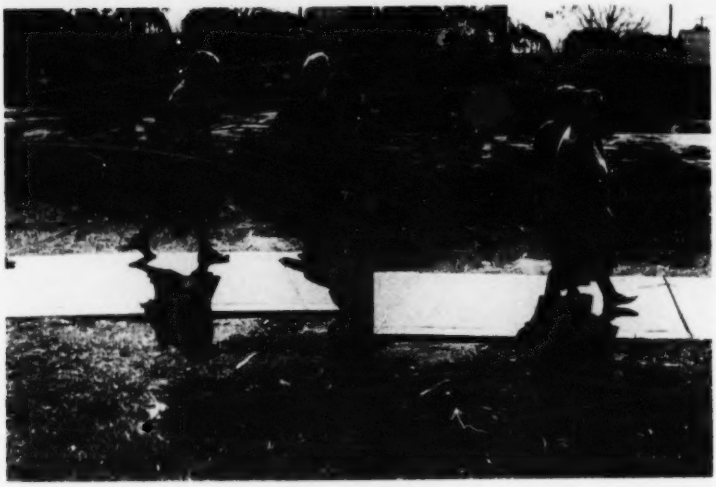
Finding a Voice

Relationship with Text

Impact on Group Identity

Wider Community Identity

IN THIS FINAL CHAPTER we talk about the impact and meaning of writing and publishing in community settings from the point of view of people and their identity as individual members of groups and larger communities. We suggest that where wider community identity is concerned, there are particular possibilities opened up in relation to 'sense of place'.



Walking in Narrabundah.

Kirra members referred to their experience of the memories sessions as an 'unfolding'. They felt that they unfolded their own stories, often remembering things they had thought forgotten, and that through this there was an unfolding of each other to the group which they delighted in.

'Unfolding' seemed an apt and strong image for the process we observed taking place around the various writing activities in the 'Building Canberra' project. Drawing on what Kirra members had identified, we came to see 'unfolding' as a number of overlapping experiences; individuals finding a voice as they told or wrote their stories, a new awareness of each other, and the development of a new sense of group identity which in turn informed understandings of a wider community identity.

These reflections may be useful in situating an activity or project within the philosophical framework of community cultural development, and in connecting it with the wider world of writing. They may also help in considering the long-term benefits of an activity or project for the community of which it is a part – a question which concerns any funding body. Finally, they may help in promoting discussion amongst people working together, as a way of developing shared understandings across diverse interests.

Finding a Voice

FOR US THE IDEA OF THE WRITER'S 'VOICE' is a very powerful one. 'Finding a voice' suggests speaking out – speaking into the world with the confidence of being heard. It involves claiming a story and the words to tell it as your own. It's a strong moment when people who feel that they don't have anything 'interesting' to tell, first start to put a story into words. Or when people who have been denied a hearing or have felt they don't have a right to one, take courage and embark on a project to tell their story in their own way. It's like dipping a toe into cold water, tentatively, but with increasing confidence, as the desire to swim becomes more important than that first shiver.

At the time of our work at Canberra Hospital, the recent circumstances of amalgamation and workforce restructuring meant that change in work practices and its consequences was an issue for everyone. Many people were 'watching what they said' and others were 'not talking'. The risks of 'speaking' seemed great – but so were the rewards, and often the excitement of telling was quite graphically expressed:

We're a bit down at the moment
She's not permanent
She doesn't know what job she's in

My job's been upgraded

We're getting more and more responsibilities
But we don't know what's happening

We've decided if we don't get our jobs
We're just walking out

Show them where the power point is and go!

'Now Everybody Has To Apply For Their Job',
The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital, p.21

This piece shows a strengthening of voice as the story develops. There is a sense of growing assertiveness as the experience becomes a story to be told expressively to others and the words sharpen and take on a particular character.

As this piece also shows, individual voices are marked not just by what they say but by the way they say it. With both the Kirra memories sessions and the Narrabundah Walking Group we noticed the pleasure people took in recognising voices when we read back material, and it was always important to listeners to know who the author of a piece was. In the case of the Hospital where most authors did not want to be publicly identified, laughter in response to our performance of excerpts from *Collected Words* showed both recognition of experiences and appreciation of the particular voices which had found words for them.

Another reflection on the satisfaction found in finding a voice is the encouragement participants give each other to speak. This suggests that they are as keen for others to experience the immediate pleasure of telling or writing, as they are to hear what they have to say.

Over time participants in story sharing recognise and identify group members with the particular characteristics of their 'voices' – Betty with her matter-of-fact tone:

What girl wouldn't be having a good time
Just growing up in your teenage years
And you lived in a town with one army camp and
two airforce camps!

Betty, *Unfolding Memories*, p.8

and Billie with her sudden graphic descriptions:

We lived right across from the beach
The beach and the waves and the sea gulls
And the boats all along the horizon

Billie, *Unfolding Memories*, p.15

We have noticed that the difference in the voices in some ways reflects on the way in which they are 'found' – in a moment of relative confidence and lack of self-consciousness, or tentativeness. Some people delight in the group response and develop their characteristic style from this. For one of the most

reserved members of the Narrabundah Walking Group, walking was the moment when she relaxed and found the words for her feelings; in her words, letting herself 'go free'.

Others pursue a more private process. For instance Mavis was much more comfortable writing her stories than telling them, and preferred to share them by contributing to the book rather than reading them.

> *Sixty odd years ago my parents took my brother, sisters and myself for a picnic to Point Hutt Crossing. After spending a lovely time playing in the sand and paddling in the river while my father boiled the billy and cooked some sausages over a fire, we had a rest and Dad said, 'Come on, it's time to go home'. My youngest sister started to cry. When asked what the matter was she replied, 'I've lost my pennies in the sand' (she had two pennies in her pocket when we left home). My father said, 'Oh, never mind, we will come out another day and what do you think we will find, your two pennies will grow and we will find a Penny Tree'.*
>
> *For weeks after my sister kept asking if we could go for another picnic to Point Hutt to see if her 'Penny Tree' had grown. Eventually our parents gave in and said they would take us on the following Sunday.*
>
> *On reaching the crossing my father told us to stay in the car while he walked along ahead to see if there were any snakes about. 'All clear, come on', he said. My sister was first out of the car saying she was going to see if she could find her Penny Tree. Sure enough not far from where my father was standing was a very small tree and scattered around under it were six pennies. Oh, how happy my sister was and for years she always wanted to go to Point Hutt to see her Penny Tree.*
>
> *I was at Point Hutt Crossing last week and coming over the bridge I had to smile to myself and wonder how Ella's Penny Tree was growing.*
>
> Mavis, 'Ella's Penny Tree', *Unfolding Memories*, p.22

Relationship with Text

AT THE BEGINNING OF A PROJECT people who don't think of themselves as writers often feel unconfident about text. They may feel awkward about their words on paper whether written by themselves or scribed. We found that as participants heard their words read back and took part in the response to others, they developed a less self-conscious relationship with text and treated it more as an everyday interest. Staff at Kirra at first took notes of Tina's stories and read for her. But before long she had lost her shyness about her English and had got her granddaughter involved in typing up her stories, which she brought to each session.

In the case of the final Collecting and Recording People's Stories gathering, we noticed that participants prepared their stories with a sense of their value. It was the second year of holding this story-sharing event on a Canberra theme in Heritage Week, and everyone who had a story to share brought it on a piece of paper. They then delivered it according to their preference – some reading, some asking another person to read it for them, and some forgetting the paper and using the style of telling that was more comfortable for them.

Narrabundah Walking Group members became more discerning about what makes a good story – as listeners as well as makers of stories. They made suggestions about what should be recorded, and comments like 'that's the best story we've heard so far!' They indicated what they didn't want written down. They sometimes made a number of modifications to their text when it was read back to them. They became quite involved in getting a story right and seeing it evolve through clarification and addition.

For instance, an elaborate and funny story Nancy told about finally getting her government house after years of making requests to the appropriate department, was told and recorded several times, each time becoming more complete – and naturally, given their style, including some embellishments from George. At one stage Nancy's story finished with:

The people they gentle
They don't accomplish nothing

The discussion that followed produced some additions:

The wheel that squeaks the loudest
Is the one that gets the grease
George

And my husband said
Did you talk to that man like that?
I just couldn't stand it any more
Nancy

She saw someone moving into the house
We were supposed to get
And that blew her up
She just hopped on the bus with the kid
And went straight down to the offices
Down where the Old Canberra Hospital was
George

Narrabundah Walking Group scrapbook

Later when the Canberra Stories Group asked for permission to use the story in their book, *My First Home in Canberra*, George and Nancy looked closely at the text and edited out the most directly personal bits. They explained that it was one thing to share it in its entirety with the Narrabundah Walking Group, and to have it written down in the scrapbook, but that a publication with a general circulation would be read differently.

In the case of inviting people to write stories for the Southside Community Festival, we found that some people prepared stories which they brought along, but most preferred to wait and see. Again, with a choice of writing or talking to a scribe, it was usually those who identified strongly with the theme who chose to write, with others discovering that they had something to say by talking. Some of those people then decided to write themselves. The occasion of seeking permission to publish offered the opportunity to edit what they had already written, or make a scribed piece more writerly.

In discussing alternative ways of producing text for their publication *My First Home in Canberra*, members of Canberra Stories Group chose to take up the same approach to collection and editing as that of *Stories of the Inner South*. They felt that hearing people's voices, whether in snippets, notes or longer pieces, made for more interesting and appealing reading than a polished text with a stronger degree of editorial intervention, whether on the part of authors themselves, or an editor. However those who preferred to dot the i's and cross the t's of their contribution more exactly, would be welcome to do so. They also decided that it would be important to explain in an introduction how the text was produced and why. Responses to requests for permission to publish material in *My First Home in Canberra* suggested again, that with greater familiarity with the process, people took a more active role in seeing their words into print.

The process of becoming more familiar with, and assertive about, putting one's words into writing is the process of becoming an author. The groups and activities of 'Building Canberra' reflect this at various stages, but all show that after the experience of telling/writing and hearing or reading back stories, groups and individuals approach the matter of writing and shaping their stories with much more 'authority' than in the initial stages.

We've enjoyed the way that as their distinct words become text, either through their own agency or that of a scribe, individuals gain a heightened sense of their experiences as 'stories'. It seems that as people see themselves as having something to say and a particular way of saying it, they are encouraged to share their own stories with a more deliberate pleasure and hear each other more keenly; listening for distinct characteristics and turns of phrase, and developing an appreciation of what is offered as a story rather than a commonplace. Over time, in different situations, we've watched people become increasingly discerning readers and listeners, as well as increasingly confident authors.

When individuals are authors – ie able to read their own stories back, amongst others, as stories of the world, and can offer them to others to read – they are likely to form a more developed sense of their place in relation to the wider community. They are contributors and makers.

Impact on Group Identity

'Getting stories down' or shaping them as text in a group context has a definite impact on group identity. When members of a group read their own work alongside that of other members, or hear the stories of various group members read back to them, they become more aware of who they are as a group.

Through scribing and reading their stories back to them, members of the Narrabundah Walking Group became more aware of their special knowledge – as long-term residents, as long-term walkers, as people with stories of other places and events.

Sharing stories is a process that creates a place for what may be passed over in ordinary conversation, and opens up the opportunity for particular experiences to be heard, looked for and valued. This may result in an appreciation of difference as well as of commonality.

On our first walk George told us something about his relationship with the neighbourhood:

> *I worked on all these houses*
> *I used to be with Jennings –*
> *There's one of the old originals –*
> *This was all pre-fabs – they were built from plywood*
> *from the planes*
>
> 'A Walk Which Took Us Back: Early Spring 1991',
> *Group Walks Around Narrabundah*, p.4

Much later, Margaret told a story about her wartime experiences in England and the group learned that her husband had worked in the factory making the planes that the plywood came from.

While individuals delight in finding common threads like these in their stories (once Bill and George were almost convinced that they'd come to Australia on the same ship), over time the diversity in the group and its far reaching life experiences have become very much part of the Walking Group's special identity.

See this? We cook
Crostavecchi [dandelion]
Through the war
We ate that stuff
No oil or nothing
Because we got no bread

Dandelion
We called them Wet the Bed
We used to put them under the pillow
I tell my grandkids still
Put them under Mum's pillow
And she'll wet the bed

'A Fast Walk: Spring 1992', *Group Walks Around Narrabundah*, p.27

The Narrabundah Walking Group's enjoyment of themselves as a group led them to caption this photo:

A drunken lot (said Bill)
on coffee (said Mavis)
A queer mob (said George)

In some settings hearing the voices of others has a direct political impact such as in the Canberra Hospital project. There, in the Hospital environment, we saw the powerful effect of speaking the words of those who had given us their impressions, to an audience of management and workers from a range of areas.

We got uniforms ourselves – they're not official
The old ones were falling apart
When we got them, people started talking to us
Everyone was coming up saying
'You look so nice'
– It got a bit like 'here come the triplets'

We were going to participate and buy them too
Then we thought we'd wait to see if we got our jobs
Before we got them

Well, I might have to find someone who's about the same size as me ...!!

'Uniforms', *The Collected Words from Woden Valley Hospital*, p.15

The act of bringing very different positions to voice and the opportunity it creates has a special power. We saw this in a surprising moment at the hospital presentation where the manager, who was in a very politically sensitive situation, was moved to step up on stage and perform a song she had written expressing her own perception and hope for the work environment.

Wider Community Identity

ON BEING INVITED to look at a scrapbook at the Southside Community Festival, one man gave this telling response, 'Yes I must – might run into someone I know'. It's appropriate to our unfolding image that a book itself and the stories within its covers are opened out. It suggests that a group's publication continues the process of discovery of who 'we', collectively are, for a new readership. It implies that as well as meeting familiars, we might run into someone we don't know.

In a particular way this may mean opening new windows of understanding about a particular group or experience – *Group Walks* or *Caring Words* might be seen to do this. More generally it is an opening to an enriched sense of the fabric of a local community and its setting, as something that is made of many varied threads, and may be regarded as a plural or perhaps multiple, rather than a single entity. In this sense a community writing publication invites people to enter imaginatively into the experiences of others, offering a small exercise in 'stretching outside ourselves' into the wider web of community relationships (Porter, 1997).

There are many ways of describing the meaning of such a development for individuals and their communities. In arts terms the process of 'unfolding' at a wider community level may be seen in terms of community cultural development, and its outcome as an awareness of a sharper, more vital, more varied

and interesting cultural identity. In place terms it might be seen as an investigation which highlights the concept of 'local distinctiveness' as Sue Clifford and Angela King use it. In their words 'locality needs to be defined from the inside with a cultural and natural base, less abstraction, more detail'. This does not result in an homogeneous 'local identity', but in rich patterns of meaning made from common ingredients of place (Clifford and King, 1993).

For us, 'Building Canberra' is also a metaphor for mapping the distinct identity of any local community through the medium of community stories. In the context of Canberra itself, as we've already mentioned, local distinctiveness is barely visible. The city is known for its newness and planned quality. Its life seems to have been taken up by employment and the building of homes. Only recently has there been a two and three generational depth of memory. Visitors and residents alike have times of going round in circles looking for traces of the human tendency to congregate. It was in the nature of our exploration in this project that as relative newcomers we set off with patchy knowledge. Up till then our relationship with Canberra had had much more to do with our work and friendship networks than any sense of place.

What we did know of Canberra was at a general and abstract level. We were aware that the initial urban settlement of Canberra had taken place around the construction of the capital city in a five to ten kilometre radius of Old Parliament House, from the 1920s until the Second World War – the area which in contemporary terms is known as 'inner Canberra'. We knew that in the immediate post-war period this settlement was consolidated and extended by people whose work provided the basis for the rapid developments between the sixties and the present, and that the population had increased from about ten thousand in the '50s to over a quarter of a million people. We were aware of the way self-government was changing the flavour of Canberra life. This included a formal interest in, and awareness of, local community, cultural and heritage values, and plans for local museums and archives.

It was people's involvement in 'Building Canberra' and their strong sense of the possibilities of community writing and publishing activities in terms of the particularities of place that moved us out of the realm of abstract Canberra. We learned at first hand about the small town flavour and strong community base of the initial development of the city. Amongst people of every Canberra vintage we met those who embodied the meaning of making a break with another place, setting out on a journey and starting a new life. Almost all were eager for stories that reflected on the making of a place over two to three generations that would provide children born here with a detailed sense of that place, and have the power to stabilise the shifting ground under more recent residents' feet.

It was clear that as in any place, there would be no single sense of place, but a host of meanings and stories attached to it, all of which could fill it out as a living, ongoing event in residents' lives. We saw how the publication of a book, in this case, *Stories of the Inner South*, led to flurries of further remembering and revealed new perspectives which we had not been able to tap into in this small collection drawn from one short burst of gathering material. It would have been very easy to follow up with another book. Not one to 'get it right', as some people wanted to suggest, but one which would have led into a further unfolding by including a wider range of voices and stories expressing the great diversity of meanings that a place may hold for people.

Given this interest, the role of the grandparent generation of Canberrans was crucial and highlighted for us the important contribution elders have to make in any community. It's the older generation that knows what it means to begin from nothing, that knows the stories of the accommodation, the social life, the landmarks — now disappearing, or in that peculiarly '90s fashion, becoming the site of something else.

Working on the 'Building Canberra' project we learned much about the making of lives and places from listening to older people's stories. The degree to which this subtly awoke in us imaginative connections with the suburbs and settings we drove through daily made us aware of how much the oldest generations had to tell the community. In the age-segregated context which is typical of modern western life, older voices are heard very little. For some older people there is little opportunity to interest younger members of their family in what they have to tell. The delight with which people took books resulting from 'Building Canberra' activities home to show their families was palpable.

The range of options for older people to express themselves within the community is limited. We have a strong memory of cries from members of the Narrabundah Walking Group — 'We can't do what we want to any more!' — when the small budget allocated to their activities was threatened. It was suggested they join up with a local club. They were willing to go and have a look but felt certain it would not work for them to become part of a passive culture. 'It doesn't matter which club you go to', they said, 'the card people are there'.

Reminiscence, remembering the past, is often seen as being exclusively to do with older people — something to do, a way of coping with being old, therapeutic. We would rather think of it as a vital community activity. We felt often in working with groups of older people in different neighbourhoods how much they enrich a community, particularly in the sense of increasing the possibilities of defining place through detail as Clifford and King suggest. The sheer range of older people's knowledge in temporal and experiential terms is a medium

through which others, beset by questions of identity and change, can be directed to fragmentary continuities, disjunctures and oddities which they may recognise.

It seemed increasingly clear to us that we should understand 'remembering' in the active light of 'passing on to others'. In forgetting the significance of what older people have to tell us, we are in danger of forgetting who we are. Older people most certainly have something to say. As authors they offer their wider community a broader and deeper sense of its identity. Their 're-memberings' of their own lives put us together as members of the community. For us this was something we could not have been prepared for. When we set out to create a project we were not aware of what would unfold within it.

The project was certainly never framed within or seen by participants as a historical perspective. It included the voices of experience wanting to make themselves known:

> *We've been here that long we feel we own the capital*
>
> Bessie Bourke

and the voices of those with an interest in finding out details they were glad not to have missed out on:

> *I've got to admit that one of the best stories you got was about hippy days in Kingston*
>
> Paul Rodda, *Annie's Notebook*

Alongside our work with long-term residents of Canberra we strongly encouraged more recent residents – old or young – to contribute their experiences and impressions as part of an ongoing story of making Canberra, and as a critical aspect of the continuing development of its local identity.

> *Where was the first house?*
> *Max Street, Richardson,*
> *Nan's house.*
> *That was about ten years ago*
>
> John Johnson and kids, *My First Home in Canberra*, p.66

> *I came here on exactly 20 May 1984.*
> *When I was on the plane all the houses in Canberra looked the same – the flat roofs – like boxes. Where can I find different design?*
> *We went to Kingston first, then to Narrabundah for five years. I started to like Canberra because of the changes of colour.*
> *We've almost climbed all the hills in Canberra, and outside Canberra*
> *It's so different from home – home is the Philippines.*
>
> Esther O'Brien, *My First Home in Canberra*, p.67

At the time of our work on 'Building Canberra', there was an upsurge of interest in 'place' in community cultural development terms, through the establishment of the Community Cultural Development Fund's Community Environment Art and Design Program (CEAD). Typically the place-making projects that have emerged in the context of CEAD are collaborations between community, artists, architects and local councils, intended to commemorate and mark local and distinct meanings of place in public artwork. There is immense potential in this framework for creating and drawing on community writing and publishing activities both in terms of the consultative process involved and as material in its own right. Recently Canberra Stories Group publications have provided resource material for place-making activities in Canberra and there has been strong interest in what community stories and imaginative use of them in text form may contribute to public artwork.

'Building Canberra' suggested to us the great potential of simple community writing and publishing activities to increase individuals' awareness of the stories they have to tell and to provide people with a sense of place in relation to the wider community. Words like 'pride' and 'ease' come to mind. It also showed the potential to develop skills; listening to others, using written language, editing, working together to produce something, decision making, the details of copyright and other aspects of writing and publishing. Then there are the other outcomes which are less easily defined – the pleasure of writing and reading, telling and listening, with a special purpose; the different perspectives opened up for writers and a wider readership. Above all the experience of people taking command of their own words, their own story and marking their place in the landscape is relevant in any community.

FROM MARY'S NOTEBOOK

Travelling towards Sydney to the launch of a friend's first novel and after an intense few days of working with Annie on Out of the Ordinary, *my mind is full of community writing and publishing.*

I first met my friend Margaret when she joined a series of women's refuge writing workshops, which I was employed to lead. The group made two publications in two years and for over a year ran Homefront women's writing and publishing group as an independent group distributing its publications and making contact with women from Canberra to Toronto. Although most of the members went their own ways in the early '90s, Margaret, another member, Paris and I have continued to meet, supporting each other's varied 'Homefront' projects – one of which has been Margaret's determination to write herself into

mainstream publication. She says that joining the writing workshops made it possible for her to connect her writing with an audience and to hear her voice speaking into the world.

On the way to this literary event I am poring over the final details of the manuscript that Annie and I have been working on since 1992, finding confirmation of its value in the purpose of my journey, but more than that, celebrating the endeavour of working on our stories as part of communities and reaching out to wider audiences as a collaborative effort.

FROM ANNIE'S NOTEBOOK

Canberra is now the town where I used to live. It was the first place I came to in Australia and I have a special attachment to it. I know there are those who simply can't work it out. Those who think it's awful and can only speak of it through gritted teeth. Those who despise its orderliness and would love to shake it up in whatever way they could. One way and another people do take Canberra personally. This was certainly true for me – for a long time I found it almost offensively peculiar.

That I came to feel less intensely personal about Canberra was through making discoveries about it that stretched way outside my own experience. Over the time I worked on the 'Building Canberra' project, as I extended myself into the meanings living there had had for others, I came to know Canberra as many people's place. Sharing stories amongst groups of people seems a simple and ingenuous activity yet it is transformative. Something grew in me. A fabric of Canberra that had nothing to do with the tightly held strings I had pulled on up till then each time I formulated an opinion about it.

As I bring my writing on Out of the Ordinary *to a conclusion at my desk in northern New South Wales, a uniquely Canberra experience comes to mind. It'd begin with a funny sound, something of a pop but more of a roar – a signal to leap out of bed and rush outside with face turned up skywards. Each time it was new – the surprise of the grand and gentle serenity with which the hot air balloons sailed above rooftops. Slowly they'd float by, taking up an immense amount of dawn autumn sky space.*

I'd feel a privileged witness because even beneath the flight path, many people were still sleeping or perhaps couldn't quite launch themselves out of bed. It was something fresh and wonderful and I wanted others to be inspired by it as well. This is the feeling I get as people spark off each other in groups sharing stories.

Getting the ideas in this book on to paper has been great for me as I take story sharing and writing into groups in different settings. A reminder of the unfailing nature of the process gives impetus and direction to go out and embrace the possibilities of joining others in listening and telling, writing, recording and spreading the word about our authentic sense of wherever it is that we live and how we live there.

Never thought we'd land back in Canberra
But we did
And the kids go to Red Hill Primary

Dawn Ross

I was born here and am following my mother's footsteps
I go to the same school and live in the same area and love it

Andrew Ross

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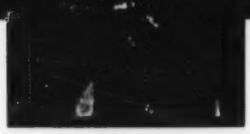
Annie Bolitho
photo: Christabelle Baranay



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In the face of globalisation of culture and cultural product it is now more important than ever that communities find opportunities and new ways to tell their stories at the local level. This handbook provides Australia's diverse communities with the means to embark on an exploration, through the written word, of their identity.

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